
Flexible Forms of Employment in the Times of Covid-19

Submitted 26/08/22, 1st revision 13/09/22, 2nd revision 28/09/22, accepted 30/10/22

Janusz Przybył¹

Abstract:

Purpose: The aim of the paper is to present transformations which appeared in organizations within the change of traditional forms of employment to flexible forms of work and online work, as well as implementation of hybrid management in these organizations.

Design/Methodology/Approach: Research method used – the analysis of secondary data available in publications related to behavior of enterprises from the beginning till the end of COVID-19 pandemics, as well as interviews with entrepreneurs.

Findings: Due to editorial limitations this article includes only fragments of research results related to the discussed issue. They, however, show the results of dynamic changes in the operations of enterprises, especially in the area of office works. As consequence of these operations, transformations in the strategy of actions of these organizations, have been implemented.

Practical implications: Performed analysis of data enables to draw conclusions connected with a sudden and unexpected situation caused by COVID-19 pandemics which resulted in changes in forms of employment. Employers' initial concerns about the possibility of controlling employees' work, costs connected with additional equipment or checking work discipline ceased to have greater significance with the course of time. Remote work and workers' engagement occurred to be effective. Appropriate trainings of managers within the process of managing distributed workforce also brought anticipated effects. As a consequence a lot of organizations continue flexible forms of employment because of saving costs connected with renting office spaces, the possibility of recruiting high qualified workers unavailable on a local labor market. Unfortunately, there is no ideal system. A significant increase of workers' low self-esteem, stress and anxiety has been noticed.

Originality/ value: The originality of research can be evaluated from the point of view of phenomena assessment possibility. Pandemics is not something untypical, however there had not been such industrialization of economy and engagement of workforce before. Thus, it seems justified, to continue research concerning flexibility of employment forms as a very important aspect being in the scope of interest of social sciences. It is, however, crucial to incorporate negative influence of this form of employment.

Keywords: Pandemic, COVID-19, flexible forms of employment, remote work.

JEL codes: M50, M54.

Paper type: A research article.

¹Lecturer, Department of Management, Faculty of Social Sciences, Calisia University – Kalisz, Poland, e-mail: j.przybyl@akademikaliska.edu.pl;

1. Introduction

Flexibility is a very important factor in today's organizations due to ongoing change of procedures related to organizations' functioning. The lack of such component may have negative effect on their activity. It was possible to realize it while facing all changes being a result of Covid-19. The necessity to implement flexibility and productivity as forms of rescue aid was expressly visible in the face of technological changes, standstill in goods supply chains and financial limitations.

Developing a strategy of flexible workplace became a demand for carrying out effective recruitment process, appropriate management of workload and even the ability to react to variety of recruited or employed personnel. The last decade proved that flexibility not only raises the level of employees engagement, but also gives satisfaction from performed work or lowers stress level in the place of work.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 The Issue of Flexible Employment Forms

Flexible forms of employment were created as a consequence of liberalization and deregulation of labor market. Nowadays this phenomenon is widely accepted not only by employers, but also by potential workers. Globalization and IT technology advancement also contributed to development of this form of employment, since they allowed for remote work, without necessity to move between places.

Other important features include factors such as unemployment, which raised a demand for implementing programs to activate disadvantaged groups. Bearing in mind the above mentioned aspects, definitions of flexible forms of employment should be appealed to.

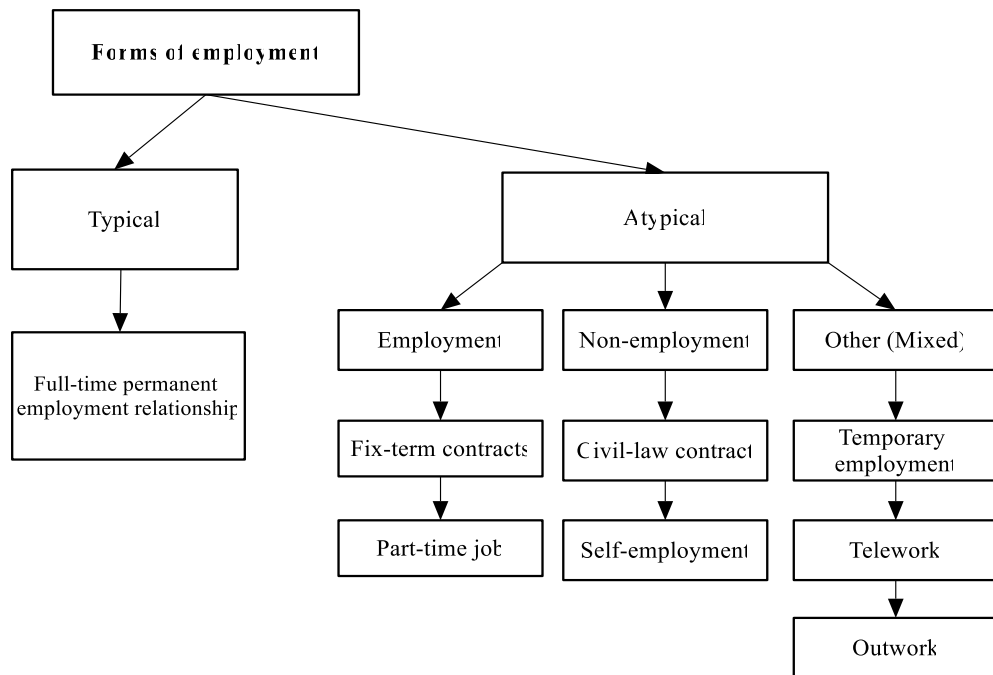
Literature devoted to work flexibility distinguishes two kinds of this phenomena: external flexibility and internal flexibility. The former is connected with conditions of work related to new employment by a different employer, but also to employee turnover and to so called geographical mobility. The latter form, on the other hand, deals with changes taking place in the whole organization, that is why its aim is to monitor occupational transitions and mobility within it. External flexibility is used to lower the number of employed personnel (Cazes and Nesporova, 2006).

Employment flexibility may be understood as individual's ability to adjust to the needs of an organization. Its reflection is adaptation of employment structure to current requirements and changes of production size. Employment flexibility is symptomatically referred to as atypical employment, new forms of employment or flexible employment relationships. According to E. Bąk forms of employment can be divided into typical employment and atypical employment including flexible forms of employment (Figure 1).

The following forms of employment are attributed to typical employment forms (Organiściak-Krzykowska *et al.*, 2014):

- Permanent employment relationship,
- Full-time employment relationship,
- Employment in one place,
- Working under employer's supervision.

Figure 1. *Employment forms classification*



Source: (Bąk, 2009), p. 11.

Atypical forms of employment are a very wide issue. They include different kinds of work performance which are quite depart from so called traditional model. These might be: fixed-term employment contract, work based on civil law contract or on temporary work.

Part-time job is the most often used form of flexible employment in contemporary organizations. It assumes employment of a worker who performs his professional duties in work time calculated on the basis of weekly reference period or average reference period for the year. It is shorter than standard full-time work. Part-time work makes it possible for the workers to adjust time of work to individual needs or current life situation. That is why this kind of work is widely appreciated by young parents and people in post-working age (Bąk, 2009).

2.2 Models of Flexible Forms of Employment

Shaping modern relations between an employer and an employee is well portrayed by L. Atkinson's flexible company model. In this model employees were divided into two groups – basic group employees and peripheral employees. Basic group employees are the core of employment and that is why they can provide functional flexibility to a company. It is possible due to organized training programs and professional carrier paths. The employees representing this group are recognized for their unique skills and competences.

Employers perceive them as company's value, more eagerly invest in their development and, at the same time, make long-time employment possible for them. The second group includes peripheral employees. The following solutions are dedicated to this group: flexible employment, reduction of no longer necessary staff, flexible time of work. Peripheral workers are recruited only in the period when increased need for production capacity is observed. These are usually people with skills and competences which can be easily found on so called external market (Atkinson, 1984).

Flexicurity model is a subsequent model depicting the phenomena of work flexibility. Its task is regulation of relations between employee and employer. It constitutes an answer for deteriorating situation on labor market. The word flexicurity is composed of two English words: flexibility and security. The aim of this model is ensuring work flexibility together with social security, which create a resultant of creating labor market politics. Such flexibility, according to the assumptions, is to demonstrate itself with entering into contracts of employment with employees and assuring the worker employment.

Moreover, this concept gives the possibility of finding new work in a fast way or taking advantage of the support in case of losing job, as well as during job search period. This flexibility also stands for solving individual's problems resulting from hard times connected with professional life such as transition from school or studies to the beginning of professional life, change of work, unemployment or lack of work time until finishing professional path due to retirement. Employee's security is understood as change of job security into employment security (Kalinowska-Sufinowicz, 2011).

Nowadays flexicurity model is based on three pillars which are referred to as golden triangle. These are: flexible provisions connected with employment, developed security system, operations of educational and activating character (Maleszyk, 2018).

Using customized forms of employment has profitable effect on labor market situation in Poland. The analysis of this sector has been performed in accordance with division into the employed and unemployed. Such division corresponded with

conditions which were shaped during first three decades from the end of World War II. These activities were realized within so called welfare state. The postwar employment model was based on submitting to bureaucratic authority of employers, who offered employees financial security (permanent income) in return. The 1970s and 1980s was the time of creation and development of untypical forms of employment which were a reaction to growing insecurity and unpredictability. These factors contributed to development of precarious employment.

Nowadays, labor market has indirect variants between traditional work and being unemployed. They are explained by segment theories of labor market, due to which performing analysis in a form of different areas cross-section became possible. A theory presenting labor market diversity is dual labor market model. In this model labor market is divided into n segments which allows to determine a group of specified problems and tendencies.

The mentioned diverse segments constitute a way to indicate processes of shaping payments and employment relationships. This model identifies two labor market segments: primary and secondary. Primary model is construed of attractive workplaces with formalized relations between an employer and an employee. Workplaces are created by big, prosperous companies. Not only employment is ensured, but also privileges such as high wages, good conditions of employment, employment stability, promotion possibility and professional development.

Secondary model denoted low wages, worse conditions of work, simple tasks, limited possibilities of development. This sector is more accessible, however, work is less stable. Dual labor market theory introduces categories of companies identical to a particular segment. Good condition of economy contributes to primary segment shaping. On the other hand, demand changeability enforced development of secondary segment which threatens economy. Thus flexible forms of employment are attributed to small and medium companies, since this segment is most exposed to business fluctuations (Bąk-Grabowska, 2016).

3. Results

Year 2020 will surely be remembered for struggles with pandemics, the results of which can be especially noticed on a labor market. On 11th March 2020 World Health Organization officially stated that COVID-19 is a worldwide pandemics. As a matter of concern for employees' health, the majority of companies took the decision to start working online at an unprecedented rate.

Professions connected with office work were in the epicenter of transformations due to uncertain epidemiologic situation. It was necessary to become online workers. This model lasts till these days in many companies, however, in those times it was a cause of crisis in the scope of management. The majority of companies decided to introduce, so called hybrid model of management in order to counteract potential

collapse. At the beginning of pandemics, employers skeptically approached online form of work, since they were afraid that employers' effectiveness would decrease. Before pandemics every third employer did not have a possibility to perform online work in his company.

According to a report prepared by 'Antal' company, more than a half of employers had a possibility to fulfill their duties on the basis of online work for 5 days a week. Workers employed as advisors had the greatest freedom in this scope. They worked outside office for 8 days a month. The second group included workers employed in e-commerce sector, Internet and new media – 7 days a month, and the third group included IT industry and telecommunication workers – 6 days a month.

Workers employed in power industry, fuel industry and mining had the slightest possibility to work online – 2 days a month on average. This data show that employers perceived giving their workers the possibility to work online as an unwanted duty. This unwillingness resulted mainly from the necessity to provide workers with appropriate tools and equipment needed to work online, which was reflected in additional financial expenses.

However, the most difficult barrier to overcome was managers' concern connected with lack of effective control of subjected staff. This apprehension was justified, since before pandemics very few companies decided to train managers in the scope of online team management. Punctuality and work organization resulting from self-discipline became very significant under pandemics' pressure. Managers were forced to trust members of their teams. Costs connected with transformation from traditional forms of work into online work also became less important.

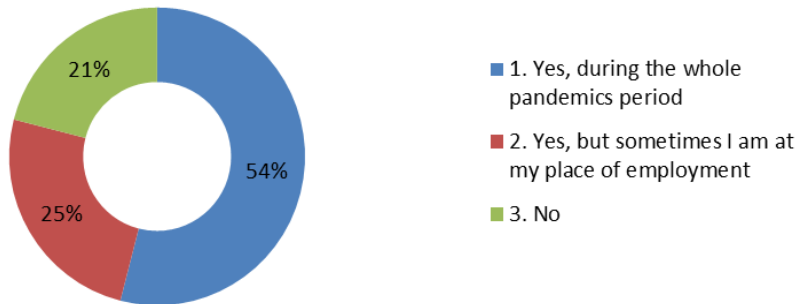
Organizations had to catch up all technological advances, since they guaranteed maintaining contracts, ongoing projects and works. Rules of work allowing to adjust to that situation without damages and larger problems also changed. During the period of pandemics 54% of specialists in Poland worked online, 25% partly online, 21% still performed work in production plants or offices (Figure 2).

Managers were prone to a lot of sacrifices and efforts, such as eagerness to work longer hours online, temporary resignation from non-cash benefits, reduction of working time in order to maintain their jobs. Changes in the scope of management did not influence managers' and specialists' feeling of safety. Workers employed in industries such as: e-commerce, internet, new media, finance and banking or insurances had the safest situation on labor market. On the other hand, workers of advertisement sector felt least safe in those times.

Except for work model change, COVID-19 pandemics also caused economic downturn. Specialists and managers took 'stand by' actions, so they started active work aimed at creating new plans of actions allowing organizations to survive. At those times, none of them could be sure what the following week or month would

bring not only for them but also for the whole world. Due to this uncertainty many companies did not want to take any risk.

Figure 2. Opinions of managers and specialists concerning work situation during COVID-19 pandemics period in 2020.



Source: Antal's Report, 2020.

These actions had special influence on carriers development, as well as all companies and economy activity. There was an economic risk referred to as self-fulfilling prophecy. This situation influenced people and their mental health, since loss of business possibilities became a fact. Due to COVID-19 a lot of workers were forced to leave work because some places of employment had closed, take leave to perform parental duties or care responsibilities. Disadvantageous payment and work conditions and uncertainty as to what would happen the next day caused a lot of threats to employers realizing their obligation to work (Table 1).

4. Discussion

Efficiency of remote work remained on a considerably high level. Saving time and money resulting from commuting to work proved to be the greatest advantage. Teleworking was deemed a future form of work even before COVID-19 pandemics. Hybrid model of management created due to isolation caused by pandemics became a revolution and, at the same time a chance to use a new approach also after corona virus threat. Economists think that this period was extraordinary, since under the influence of compulsion, employers discovered that employees could make decisions concerning the form of work on their own.

The key questions were: when should remote work be made easier for workers, when should workers be encouraged to work remotely, and when organisational culture of work based on face to face contact should be emphasized. After COVID-19 pandemics Antal performed a survey which indicated that 80% of specialists and managers are still willing to work remotely. Such solution is especially desired in case of creative work. According to respondents brainstorming or internal meetings should be held in offices (Antal's Report, 2020).

Table 1. Changing conditions of work during COVID-19 period, increasing stress and anxiety at work.

Stressful conditions of work during COVID-19 pandemics		
For all workers of an organization	For workers performing their work at their place of employment	For online workers
Adjustment to various burdens, roles and duties and managing them	Fear or concern connected with one's health or relatives' health after interaction with other people.	Financial problems connected with closing a company, loss of job or longer absence.
Adjustment to a different place of employment or new work schedule	Increased demand on services which results in frequent changes or shift work.	Anxiety connected with the future of one's place of employment or safety of work.
Adjustment to new communication methods and tools	Increased pressure at work which demands making decisions at a high level.	Fear or concern about experiencing stigmatization or discrimination after self-isolation and return to work.
Balancing professional duties with family roles	Increased exposition to emotionally difficult or concerning events.	Stress or family tension arising from staying with family members for a long time.
Anxiety connected with the future of one's place of employment	Concerns about securing with appropriate infection control measures.	Social isolation
Financial issues connected with working hours reduce, longer absence at work or unemployment	Concerns connected with one's family situation and general feeling of lack of control.	Impossibility or inaccuracy of professional duties performance due to simultaneous work and family care responsibilities.
Anxiety connected with technology and tools used to perform work tasks in an effective way	Avoiding contacts on the part of family members, friends or whole community as a result of stigmatization and fear of COVID-19	

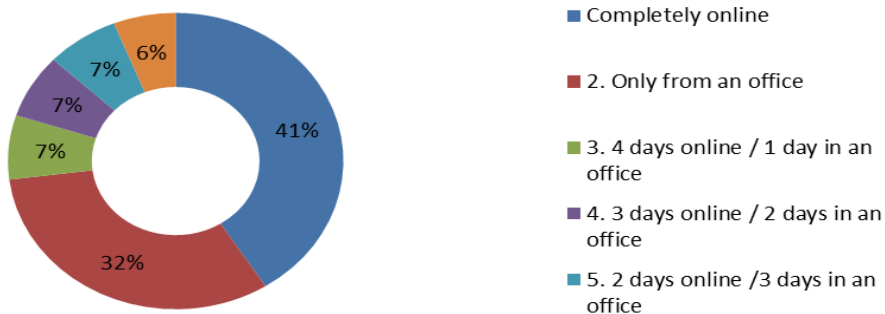
Source: Drela, 2021, pp. 241-242.

It is worth emphasizing that the majority of employers in modern places of work are most usually co-workers – creators who perceive office as a kind of a distractor. Thus, for them the most important factor of effective work is work in so called quiet hours. Such conditions enable them to dedicate themselves to deep work.

COVID-19 pandemics showed that work can be organized in a hybrid form (2 days a week of remote work) and bring expected results. According to experts, IT specialists should work remotely even four days a week. Employers will have to take this aspect into consideration while employing specialists, even at the stage of recruitment.

Data collected by Antal allow to notice trends change connected with management of an organization. Nowadays, every third respondent does not have a chance to work in his organisation. Requirement created in 2020 resulted in different perception of remote work. About 41% of respondents do not perform their work in an office at all and every third person came back to work realized within a hybrid model (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Opinions of specialists and managers on place of work in 2021



Source: Antal's Report, 2020.

Company meetings realized in a form of a videoconference became especially important. Researched specialists and managers declared that they devote less than 5 hours a week for online meetings, $\frac{1}{4}$ of them devotes between 6 and 10 hours and 11% from 11 to 15 hours a week for such meetings (Antal's Report, 2020).

Videoconferences, treated before as a kind of luxury, started to function as a necessity and required minimum for effective functioning of an organization. This tool was also used in a process of online recruitment, which was not a problem for candidates and for entrepreneurs. The possibility to perform work in a hybrid form allows to recruit candidates outside their geographical region.

Companies from distant regions of the country (so far perceived as less attractive) got a chance of employing specialists for whom working a few days in a company and the rest in a form of a home office became very functional. Everyday online communication became a rescue for all organizations all over the world and, at the same time, verified the need of increasing costs resulting from creating new places of work (ClickMeeting, 2020).

5. Conclusions

Traditional employment model based on entering into employment contract became less significant under the influence of COVID-19 pandemics. Uncertainty as to what will happen the next day and economic downturn forced employers to maximize also costs connected with maintaining an employee. Development of flexible forms

of employment, especially remote work became labor market reaction to sustain organizations' activity stability in the period of crisis caused by corona virus and consequent isolation. Tools such as webinars, remote work and videoconferences were identified with time and money savings. Incidents which took place in March 2020 proved that issues which were previously treated as a choice became obligatory and necessary to run a business.

Entrepreneurs who undertook necessary measures to keep working and maintain workplaces were forced to revise their companies from the point of view of the entrepreneurship strategy of action. In order to protect oneself from the next economic downturn, the owners of even the smallest entrepreneurship should take into consideration the issues connected with employment flexibility. In case of potential crisis, it will be much easier for entrepreneurs to manage costs when they have all possible scenarios connected with all kinds of risks calculated. Thus, flexibility should be included into company's strategy and constitute an added value.

References:

- Antal. 2020. Elastyczność specjalistów i menedżerów w dobie zmiany, Report.
- Antal. 2021. Elastyczność specjalistów i menedżerów na rynku pracy, Edycja 2, Report.
- Atkinson, J. 1984. Manpower strategies for flexible organizations, *Personel Menagement*.
- Bąk, E. 2009. Elastyczne formy zatrudnienia na rynku pracy. In: C.H. Beck, Warszawa.
- Bąk-Grabowska, D. 2016. Zarządzanie zasobami ludzkimi w warunkach stosowania niestandardowych form zatrudnienia, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego we ClickMeeting, 2020, Webinary i wideokonferencje w czasach pandemii, Report. Wrocławiu, Wrocław.
- ClickMeeting. 2020. Webinary i wideokonferencje w czasach pandemii, Report.
- Kalinowska-Sufinowicz, B. 2011. Model Flexicurity – wyzwanie XXI wieku dla polskiego rynku pracy, *Zeszyty Naukowe*, nr 185, Uniwersytet Ekonomiczny w Poznaniu, Poznań.
- Maleszyk, P. 2018. Porażka flexicurity? Duński rynek pracy w okresie kryzysu finansowo-gospodarczego, *Prace Naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego we Wrocławiu*, nr 537, Wrocław.
- Organiściak-Krzykowska, A., Walkowiak, R., Nyklewicz, K. 2014. *Innowacyjne formy pracy*, Wyd. UWM, Olsztyn.