

ON VIRUSES AND HUMANS: PSYCHOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL CHALLENGES TO HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT IN REMOTE WORKING CONDITIONS²

The current Covid-19 pandemic provoked alternative work arrangements and a large proportion of employees started to work from home. Despite the initial technological euphoria, this change started showing not only positive, but serious negative phenomena in terms not only of organization and daily practices, but also of psychological and managerial nature. It brought a lot of new questions and problems concerning all soft management elements, especially in the domains of corporate cultures, work motivation and individual psychological responses. This article provides an overview of some major issues of this type and offers ways of tackling them. The new normal is not exactly normal and the old one already seems irrevocably lived-through. While there is no doubt that the future will offer a lot more flexibility and various options for combined distant and office work arrangements, this article explains why the current extent of working from home should rather remain as a transitory element responding to the exceptional circumstances.

Keywords: Organizational culture; distance working; working from home; human resources management; Covid-19

JEL: M12; M14; Z13

The unforeseen and sudden onset of the pandemic has changed a lot in the way we live, communicate and work. The processes of change continue dynamically – with the change of some elements, the consolidation of others, the deepening of the third, and the attenuation of the fourth. We are generally on the way to the so-called “new normality”, which will inevitably involve a return to certain aspects of the old but will also bring something new, different, unmanifested before the onset of pandemic times. One of the most significant phenomena accompanying the development of the pandemic situation is working from home (WFH, work online, home office, telecommuting, etc.)

The trend towards greater flexibility in working schedules is not new, but it has developed along an exponential curve and has been enriched with flexibility in terms of workplace location. The outbreak of the global health crisis has forced the slow and hesitant introduction

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of new computer technologies into the work and communication of large groups of people. Platforms like Teams and Zoom are not new, but their use had not become a priority before the imperative change of scenery took place.

Perhaps understandably, the main focus, in the beginning, was on the technological and logistical aspects of the new type of work in an electronic environment: work organization, hardware, software platforms, legal dimensions of the new type of jobs. The first euphoric reactions appeared, the result of the relatively fast and successful dealing with the technological solutions in question. The technocrats put on their pink glasses and talked about the end of the offices. Employers quickly saw a chance to cut office costs. There was also a wave of elation among employees who did not have to travel in the morning and evening and who could work without going to work at the same time. When the cloud of chaos and ambiguity began to dissipate, however, it turned out that the picture was not so simple and contained many questionable and unavoidable problems.

Quite naturally, many psychological, cultural, and practically all soft factors of management (as well as some harder ones) which had been left somewhere beyond the focus of attention, began to remind for themselves. The key and seemingly already recognized the importance of organizational cultures, time-tested motivational practices, and leadership, which seemed to have been forgotten and underestimated, again became clearly relevant in the context of the new pandemic conditions and remote work models.

In fact, the issue is multifaceted, because there is a difference between having operational teams moving from office to WFH and communicating via any of the electronic platforms, and having teams created for work in such conditions. The problem can be expected to be different if the culture found before the pandemic was good and if it was not. There are obvious differences too in the perspective of the different businesses, industries, spheres of activity, and professions, where due to the nature of the work itself, the new conditions are differently new and the effect of them can be very different. Of course, individual personal characteristics and the cognitive and behavioural tendencies they carry, as well as age and status differences, continue to be important. But there is already data and a basis for identifying and understanding some common phenomena and trends related to work from home.

A recent survey (Qualtrix-Quartz, 2021), covering 2100 respondents from Europe, Asia, North America, and Australia, shows some results in the field of interest. In June 2020, 19% of the respondents disliked working from home, compared to 54% who approved with significant differences between large ethnocultural groups: only 39% of Europeans welcomed home office, compared with 67% in Africa and 66% in Asia, 55% in Australia and 60% in North America. There is also a significant difference between the opinions of the respondents according to the size of the organization: 62% approval among employees for large corporations and 46% among representatives of small and medium-sized organizations. Despite these estimates, no less than 60% of the respondents said they would be happy to return to office work, at least to some extent, and only 18% did not like the idea at all. If it is not a question of a complete resumption of the office presence, but of finding a combination of work from home and office, almost 70% answer with a positive attitude, while at the same time, only about 1/3 of the respondents think that their employers will be prone to flexibility

in this regard. In this regard, there is a significant cultural difference again – US companies are twice as flexible as European ones in terms of when and how to return – at least in part – to traditional ways of working.

The survey shows that 70% of respondents define the pre-Covid culture of their organizations as good and they are the ones who (2 times more often than the others) believe that the new conditions have catalyzed positive cultural changes. Those with a clear negative attitude towards their organizational culture before the pandemic are almost 4 times more likely to describe the development of the culture in their organizations after the onset of the pandemic as deterioration. Overall, 37% of the respondents find that there is a positive development of culture due to the new conditions, and 15% do not hesitate to give unequivocal feedback, with men being almost 50% more likely than women, to approve of the new status quo. Here, too, there is a geographical (ethnocultural) difference, with 45% of North Americans more likely to describe the changes as positive, compared to 34% of European respondents.

48% of people find that they feel more connected to their colleagues, and 18% are of the opposite opinion. Among the former, those who have defined the post-Covid development of their previous organizational culture as positive, predominate, and among them, men are twice as many as women. About half of the respondents believe that the new conditions have strengthened their sense of loyalty to the organization, but for the most part, they are the same ones who liked the pre-pandemic culture in the workplace. Again, slightly more than half of the respondents self-identify as more focused in the new conditions, and again these are predominantly the same who approved of the previous culture in their organization and those who generally see the changes in an optimistic light.

Table 1 shows the answers to the question, which are the characteristics of the organizational climate which are decreasing, which stay more or less the same, and which are increasing in the conditions of working remotely in comparison with the reality before the pandemic according to the studied sample.

Table 1

Changes in the characteristics of the organizational climate in the conditions of remote work in comparison with the present one (%)

	Kind	Generous	Demanding	Transparent	Loyal	Callous	Disconnected	Supportive	Political
Increased	51	46	39	40	45	26	29	52	30
Same	43	45	46	49	46	57	45	37	57
Decreased	6	9	15	11	9	17	26	11	13

Source: <https://www.qualtrics.com/m/assets/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Qualtrics-Quartz-Results.pdf>. Retrieved: 10.04.2021.

There is a certain contradiction here: the declared growing atmosphere of support and kindness, the tendency towards more tolerance, the increased sense of loyalty and openness are combined with the perceived increase of organizational politics, distancing, and lack of empathy and sensitivity.

A team from Sloan School of Management at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Sloan/MIT) has been using a methodology developed there for several years (MIT SMR/Glassdoor Culture 500), covering more than 1.4 million employee reviews in 500 leading companies to analyze various aspects of cultures. In a study with the same methodology from the end of 2020, devoted to the impact of the pandemic and distance work, there are some interesting results as well, although only within the US (Sull, 2020)

One of the outstanding phenomena caught in this study is the relatively sharp increase in the positive judgement of employees concerning the amount of communications and openness of managers in dealing with the pandemic crisis after the start of WFH compared to previous times, which we could call normal. The respondents are much more critical when it comes to agility and management efficiency after the start of the new schemes of work. The “accusations” are mainly in areas such as: bureaucracy (almost 40% negative assessment), paperwork (in the conditions of new technologies, this means mainly the number and organization of e-mails and messages), slow reaction to changes, risk aversion, uncertain priorities, quantity and quality of meetings, impaired sense of community (big-company feel).

Microsoft is also reporting results from an interesting survey (TechRepublic, 2021), which includes interviews with more than 30,000 employees from 31 countries, combined with an analysis of billions of e-mails, messages, meetings in the online platforms, and more. These studies show that the flexibility and agility associated with new forms of WFH are positively assessed by employees and obviously, at least some of these forms will be maintained in the future. The conclusion is confirmed that about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the people want the flexible mixed forms, including remote work, to be kept in some form after the normalization of the situation. Among the positive changes caused by the massive increase of WFH, the interviewees point out the increased chance and opportunities they have to pay more attention to their relatives and partners and to communicate with them in general. However, over 67% of them declare that they want more live communication with their colleagues in parallel with the opportunities for remote work.

At the same time, the study identifies a problem with the blurring of the boundaries between professional and personal spaces and a lack of transition between them (during travel to and from work, for example). The significant increase in the duration of online meetings compared to conventional ones combined with the presence of unscheduled online meetings led to a twofold increase in the time spent in meetings. Chat messages, in general, have increased by 45%, and those received and sent during non-working hours – by 42%. Aside from the issue of meetings on some platforms such as Teams and Zoom, 66% of people say they create and read many more written documents online instead of having more basic and faster forms of live conversations. In 2020 and 2021, the number of e-mails sent was many billions more (40 billion only through one of Microsoft’s mail platforms) compared to similar periods last year. Over the past one-year period, the work on digital documents has increased by over 60%.

These are probably just some of the reasons why 54% of the respondents in this study think that they are overworked, and almost 40% – exhausted by the new methods of communication and work. The tension of the imperativeness and urgency of virtual meetings,

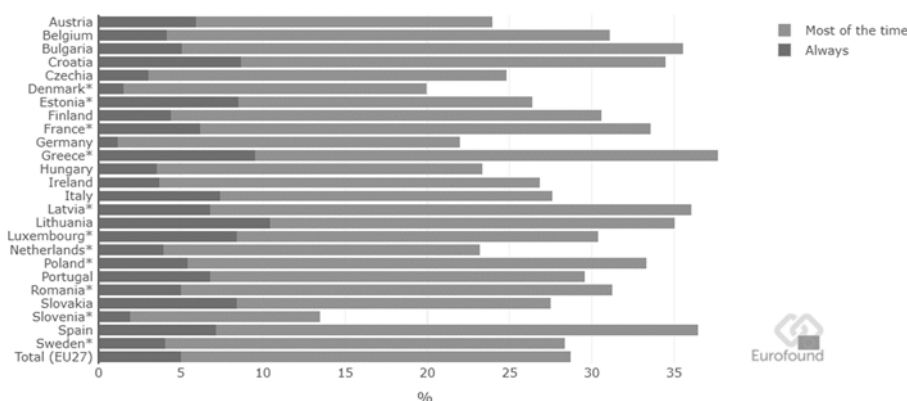
combined with the lack of the typical subtle social signs and body language, makes communication and interpretation of meanings and intentions more painful. To compensate for the lack of these natural contextual elements of live communication, chat in small groups or pairs increases significantly. It also contributes to feelings of fatigue, anxiety, and exclusion at least from the “big picture”. One spends more time with colleagues with whom one works in direct cooperation, but much less time with one’s wider communication networks. At the end of the day, this is a threat to creativity, innovation, and opportunities for good performance. The hardest hit is for the new employees with less than a year of experience, for generation Z (18-25 years), and for those who live alone.

Some data are beginning to show (<https://Employees under 35 prefer office life to remote working | ZDNet>) that younger employees are flocking back to the office. But why? Many Millennials and Gen Z-s want to be promoted, want to belong to a community, and want to be mentored. They very well know they need to be in the office to reap those benefits, even if they want to use WFH. In addition, they are unsure of the expectations around work-from-home if there is potentially conflicting information from policy, their co-workers, and management. They, therefore, cannot take advantage of telecommuting as much as they would like to. In other words, there is a huge disconnect in expectations around work-from-home for these specific age groups.

Another survey offers more or less similar conclusions when it comes to fatigue and emotional drainage while WFH during the Covid-19 pandemic. Figures 1, 2 and 3 can demonstrate some aspects of the problem. A considerable amount of the respondents report that at the end of the day, they are too exhausted to do something else at home. Many of them feel deprived of free time, and not a small fraction of them report that they feel *emotionally* (not mentally or physically) drained by the remote type of work.

Figure 1

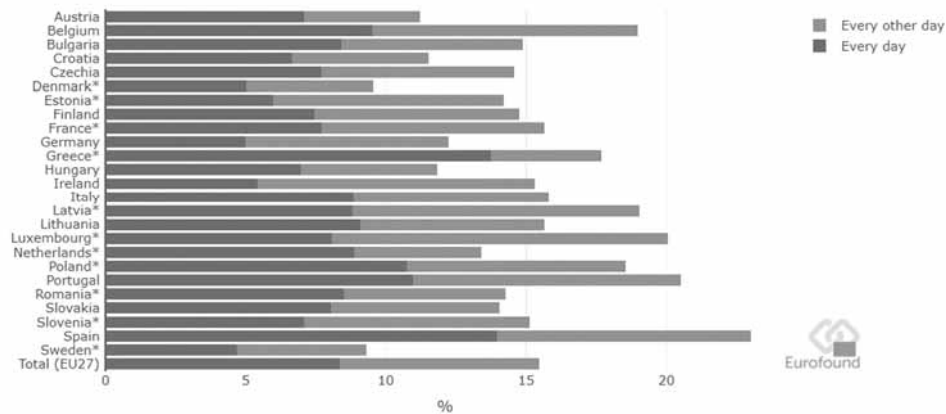
How often in the last two weeks you have felt too tired after work to do some household jobs



Source: Eurofound (2020), Living, working and COVID-19 dataset, Dublin, <http://eurofound.link/covid19data> (Some countries excluded due to insufficient data; (*) – low statistical reliability, Retrieved: 14.04.2021.

Figure 2

Over the last two weeks, how often have you worked in your free time in order to meet work demands

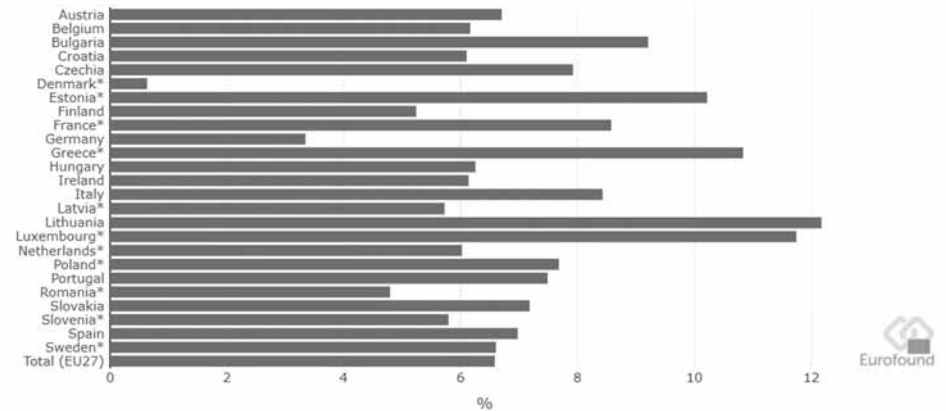


* low statistical reliability, Retrieved: 14.04.2021.

Source: Eurofound (2020), *Living, working and COVID-19 dataset*, Dublin, <http://eurofound.link/covid19data> (some countries excluded due to insufficient data).

Figure 3

You feel emotionally drained by work



* low statistical reliability, Retrieved: 14.04.2021.

Source: Eurofound (2020), *Living, working and COVID-19 dataset*, Dublin, <http://eurofound.link/covid19data> (Some countries excluded due to insufficient data).

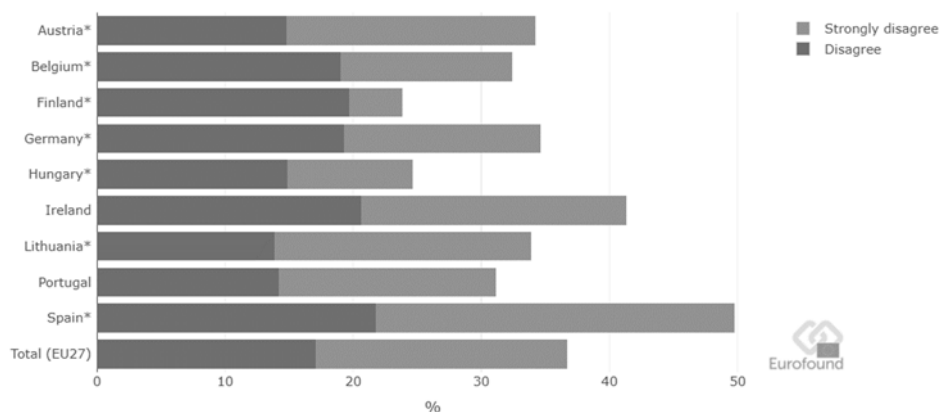
Companies are offering more and more remote positions (5 times more in a year than in the previous year in LinkedIn), but few of them take real and consistent care and investment in the conditions for such work – one in every ten employees does not have good enough internet at home, 42% feel the lack of basic office equipment and less than half of the workers working from home worldwide have received at least partial reimbursement for the costs they

have incurred for this purpose. It is this lack of support that may be at the root of the fact that 41% of employees report intentions to quit within a year (54% of those in Generation Z).

One of the clear problems is purely technological and is related to the increase of bureaucracy, the amount of written communication associated with at least to some extent to the increased tendency of risk aversion. The hardware aspects of online connectivity and access and connection quality of internet platforms and the internet itself are also not to be neglected, including in terms of the employer's commitment to providing material conditions for WFH. A considerable amount of employees even haven't received the necessary basic technological support from their employers (Figure 4), which not only affects the quality of work, but harms culture as well. There is no clarity and certainty in other pragmatic technological management problems, such as the legal regulation of the new remote working methods, the control over the participation and the contribution (where such control is necessary), etc.

Figure 4

My employer provided me with all necessary equipment to work from home during the Covid-19 pandemic



* low statistical reliability, Retrieved: 14.04.2021.

Source: Eurofound (2020), *Living, working and COVID-19 dataset*, Dublin, <http://eurofound.link/covid19data> (some countries excluded due to insufficient data).

The changes look different through the eyes of the employer and the staff. It can be expected that in the short term, both parties will spontaneously tend to be positive about WFH, albeit for many different reasons – employers due to reduced office maintenance costs and employees due to increased degrees of freedom of choice of time and method of work and the absence of commuting to and from work. (Interestingly, 85% of respondents in the Qualtrix-Quarz study do not feel anxious to return to their traditional ways of travelling to the office.)

The industry specifics have also had and still have an impact not only on the typical cultural dominants (the worlds of the software industry and the pharmaceutical company are difficult to compare), but also on the technical possibilities, limits, and forms of application of remote

methods of work and communication. This industry framework also includes the fact that different industries suffer to a very different degree from the effects of pandemics and lockdowns. Call centres may not feel much pressure, unlike tourism, restaurants, air transport, office buildings, and more, as well as their suppliers and users along the value chain.

With a slightly more complex, in-depth, and long-term perspective, however, these processes of transition to digitalization and distant forms of work and communication cannot but be associated with significant issues in terms of psychology, culture, and management.

According to some studies (Stahl, 2020), no less than 70% of employees who work entirely or partially from home experience symptoms of burnout, which has serious consequences for both their health and productivity. It is good to remember that burnout does not mean just boredom or fatigue, but has been shown to be associated with many negative physical and mental conditions such as: high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity, weakened immune system, anxiety, depression, decreased cognitive capacity, Alzheimer, etc. There is also evidence of another additional important effect resulting from forced social isolation – loneliness. Studies show that if overweight reduces life expectancy by an average of about 20%, alcohol use – by 30%, brain-somatic reactions to feelings of exclusion and loneliness can cause up to 70% negative effect on the same indicator (Petrie, 2018).

Working from home can be detrimental as well due to the inability to draw a clear line between working time and other activities. Employees report an increased number of working hours – an average of three – under the new conditions (Davies, 2020). The classic working conditions presuppose working and domestic domains of life with a quite clear boundary between them. Blurring this boundary has negative consequences on the sense of well-being and commitment (Ashforth, 2000).

In fact, here we are touching on a phenomenon that is well known to all those employed in the academic field (especially doctoral students), and which few employees in other fields have experienced before the introduction of mass distance working. The freedom to choose the time and method of work may seem very attractive, but like any freedom, it can bring unbearable and sometimes unexpected burdens. This is due to the lack of clear boundaries of working hours and institutional regulation of the process, reflecting in constant burdening of the psyche with guilt for something unfinished, for insufficient activity, for “wasted” time, etc.

Many of us would bet that in some cases working without colleagues around can seem like a real holiday. But in many situations (for example, if something goes wrong with a given task, a colleague leaving or being fired, the insufficient ability of superiors to lead well online, restructuring, to give a few examples), the employee begins to feel painful isolation, confusion, and lack of support. According to Cachopo (UCLA), these feelings of isolation and relative loneliness can affect a person’s global perceptions of the world, make him feel threatened, reduce his trust in others, and activate defence mechanisms (Cacioppo, 2014). Perhaps this is at least one of the factors leading to the trend of increasing the burden of electronic, written communication.

The increased feeling of burnout is not limited to the emotional response and negative feelings experienced by the individual. There are changes in the anatomy and functioning of the brain associated with impaired cognitive abilities (the capacity to think, learn and pay attention) and in the neuroendocrine systems (serotonin and adrenaline cycles). Increased levels of stress include a “survival” mode that damages our ambitions, responsibility, creativity, inspiration, and so on.

Even without the symptoms of burnout, the socio-psychological environment itself is extremely challenging to mental health in general, and this is a key input factor from the environment that cannot be bypassed when considering the micro-level picture. These are general experiences of isolation, fear for oneself and loved ones, frustration, anxiety, interpersonal tensions, and damaged relationships in and out of the family context due to forced confinement, etc.

Outside of these individual psychological effects, but in direct connection with them, the new WFH practices have very important cultural and motivational dimensions. As we pointed out at the beginning, there are significant differences in terms of industries and types of activity, the status quo before the pandemic changes, etc. But in general, the non-cognitive and emotional factors of any work with people and of any management and leadership, neither disappear with the new conditions, nor their importance decreases.

In general, there is no organization or team without culture. It would be at least naive to perceive man and the relations between people – power-based, collegial, and personal, as relationships between avatars and algorithms or as a simple division of labour, organization, coordination, planning, and so on. This would mean going back at least 150 years to our understanding of what management, people management, and working with people mean. The various soft factors have neither disappeared nor can be easily translated into the language of virtual communication and WFH. The bigger part of the fruitful life of man passes in one or more organizations, i.e. work cannot be perceived as a means of subsistence, it is life, a very large part of it. At the same time, it is empirically clear to everyone, and cognitive-neuroscientific research shows it eloquently, that a massive part of our decisions and preferences, on the basis of which our relationships are built, are non-cognitive at their core. They are primarily emotional and are related to such vague concepts as sense, artistry, non-verbal communication, tact, “feeling” of the other person and his goals, intentions, motives, essence. It is on this basis that a significant part of the phenomenon we call leadership is formed, and it has a lot to do with trust, cohesion, self-identification and a sense of togetherness in a team, and with a significant share of motivation and motivational tools. In practice, a huge part of our social dynamics outside of organizations, in our personal lives, is based on the same.

Let us remind that organizational culture can be thought of as a set of values that are common to a group at a given time; values that are expressed in language, norms, artefacts, rituals, conventional wisdom, organizational climate, etc. The synchronicity of value interpretations and hierarchies builds the very fabric of the community, provides for a (better or worse) orchestrated internal integration and external adaptation, builds a unique organizational “parallel reality”. The latter cannot but be influenced from outside, from its macro-environment and its values (say, national-cultural, professional, or sectoral), but at the end,

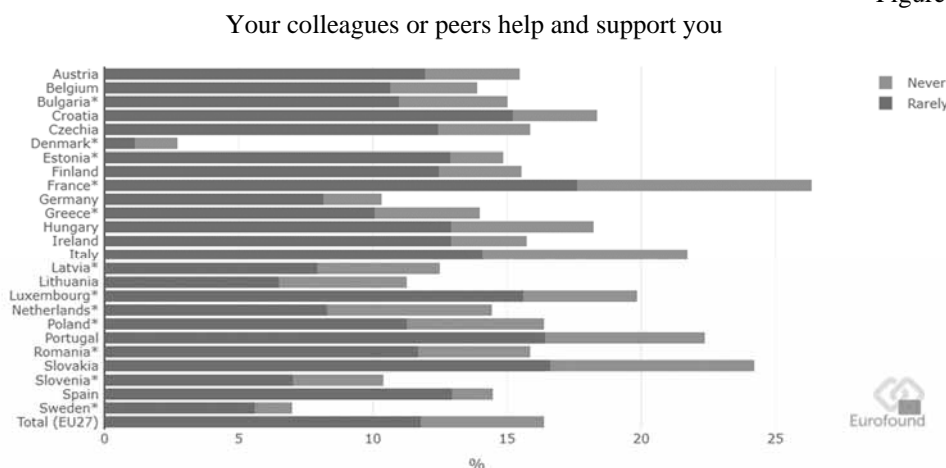
each organization is a small world, a small “bubble” of reality against the background of everything around. In this reality – no matter how different or unique is each person – there is a certain consonance in the ways of thinking and evaluation, in the semantic interpretations of objects and events, in behaviours, reactions, etc. All this is achieved in terms of cognitive, meaningful, subject to consistent logical and analytical elements, but twice as much in terms of non-cognitive, emotionally based, and unconscious ones. Just like in all other, non-organizational aspects of our lives and our relationships with other people. Add to this the seemingly underestimated fact that any leadership, whether charismatic or not, inevitably implies a motivational, emotional, and value charge that cannot be isolated from culture. Culture cannot be managed in the literal sense of the word, but conditionally speaking, leadership could also be defined as the management of culture and management through culture.

The simple physical encounter with people in the office, the joint lunch, and the small talk around the coffee machine and in the office corridors may seem insignificant and irrelevant to the successful joint work, but this is how people get to know each other and build social capital. In this way, trust is built, the invisible threads of the sense of “we” are created, areas of common interest are opened, ideas are generated and conversations are started. It is hardly necessary to go back more than a century and recall the dawn of scientific management when it was scientifically established that even simple cooperation (work in the mere physical presence of other workers, without division of labour) significantly increases productivity compared to individual forms of organization.

Proven effective motivational practices related to the recognition of abilities and contribution, the impact on the individual perceptions of the content of work such as importance and interest, teamwork and support, etc., are realized not only and not so much in an official or institutionalized form, but many of them are often the product of elementary but immediate human communication with all its verbal and nonverbal attributes.

Some of the phenomenological components of organizational culture, such as the specifics of spoken organizational or group language (like speech, in combination with all its prosodic elements, usually loaded with a huge amount of semantic context), rituals, norms, artefacts, and organizational climate, for example, may not work remotely or may not function properly. What we call “atmosphere” in the office is absent, and with it – a significant part of the sense of community and identification with the organization or the team coming along the cultural and motivational charge of this atmosphere. Under such conditions, the arsenal of any leadership is severely deprived of its typical weapons, incl. the charismatic elements. The feeling of distance and, in many cases – isolation – cannot but increase. The borders and the functioning of the informal structures and the established informal communication networks have been violated. All this reflects in reduced levels of trust. In connection with the above said, there is a growing feeling among employees that they lack enough support from colleagues and peers (Figure 5).

Figure 5



If we allow ourselves in just one paragraph, in addition to what has been said, to get rid of the analytical approach and use a maximum level of concreteness and some imagery, we will agree that each of us has seen (not personally, but with friends, of course) how kitchens, living rooms and bedrooms, and sometimes closets and glazed balconies, are tortured to be turned into work corners. Very few people have the opportunity to set up one or two office rooms or libraries in their homes. The internet is not always and not everywhere good enough. Households with more members either have to share a computer or everyone has their own, usually living together with plates and cups – washed or not – on the kitchen or living room table. It is impractical to expect that at any given time these “workstations” and their associated cables, documents, and folders will be cleared and collected by the next business day, especially since e-mails and messages arrive outside of business hours too, so very often you can have dinner on your knees in front of the TV, and the atmosphere is not suitable for meetings with friends. In many cases, children go or run around in the process of their remote learning (in many cases only formally) or use computers – sometimes their own, but in most cases their parents’ ones while at the same time these parents are expected to be working remotely as well. Online meetings, e-mails, and chats are significantly more compared with the classic forms of work. Meetings which are sometimes exhaustingly long and poorly structured. It is not uncommon for parents from one or adjoining rooms to attend team meetings in parallel, while the children are online, the dog barks at someone outside, the cat crosses the keyboard to optimize her route, and the food burns in the furnace. If there are preschool kids around, they may not always be sent to a kindergarten due to the closure of the latter or for some other reason, so there may be diapers in the workplace and the sound in the background may be by several decibels higher. There is no one to keep track of time and method of work, but this means not only freedom but also relentless tension from accumulating tasks, unread letters, approaching deadlines and unanswered messages. There

is a growing sense of isolation and the suspicion that a person is missing something important in his or her office world, something, which may be happening to or between colleagues and the organization as a whole. This brings additional annoyance to being forcibly closed between four walls with your otherwise loved ones. There is no rhythm and dynamic stereotype of activities to help. The boundaries between office and personal realities are seriously blurred, from which women suffer more because they are still the main drivers of household activities. As we already saw, Generation Z-s are another group massively hit by the new work realities.

Organizational culture is associated only to a certain extent with the technological manner of work and communication, i.e. with the norms regulating the organization of work, planning, coordination, control, etc. It largely remains in the semi-conscious and semi-visible elements of interaction and togetherness.

The culture of a company goes beyond setting and preaching its vision, mission, and goals. How these missions and goals are visualized and internalized by every employee and how they are met, is where company culture comes in. Unlike a business' vision and goals, which are written down and reminded frequently, the culture of a company is not something to be simply decided, set, or noted down and preached. It is something that develops in the course of work, as the employees integrate and develop a team spirit. If the vision and mission of a company is the starting point, then its culture is the journey which is embarked on by everyone who makes the company what it is. It is something that is cultivated along the way rather than something that is adapted.

Once this culture is formed, there is a need to keep it fostered, because it is this culture that will act, at the end of the day, as the driving force for the employees to visualize the growth of the organization and to act in accordance with that vision. Organizational culture drives employees to reach goals that they see as a team for the company, gives them a sense of identity and belongingness, creates faith in them to work harder to cope with problems and crises. Culture also has a great impact on keeping the zest and enthusiasm of working for a collective cause. As a result, all of these points mentioned above will, in-turn, foster team building, cooperation, productivity, and therefore- job satisfaction.

The issue is that WFH model cannot but negatively affect all these cultural functions.

In the first place, distance work is inevitably curbing interactions. Face-to-face interaction can never be on par with the virtual one. When employees work from home, the maximum interaction they have with their co-workers is via mails, calls and online meetings. Creating stronger bonds with co-workers is crucial for any group activity, but forming such bonds requires physical presence, which is ruled out through occasional interactions on screen. Studies conducted by a Harvard Business School team (Worline, 2017). in the field of emotional intelligence show that companies with stronger co-worker bonds show signs of increased job satisfaction and, therefore, productivity and growth. Sharing a strong relationship with co-workers also helps foster team spirit, which remains blurred in the WFH as good team-building almost always requires us to be physically present. This interaction also plays an imperative role in developing trust among co-workers, which is another extremely important quality required to build a positive team that works towards the success of the organization.

Hand-in-hand with the need for interaction goes the issue of loyalty. Without active interactions, how does an employee develop a sense of loyalty, not only towards his/her co-workers but towards the business as a whole? This loyalty can act as a driving force to do better for the growth of a company. A study (Comparably, 2021) shows the importance of loyalty in work culture and the data in this survey essentially show that workers express a sense of loyalty towards their co-workers, relatively more than they do towards their employer/boss. This means that they are ready to help their co-workers in times of difficulties, which could reduce stress levels, encourage team cooperation during crises, and therefore increase a sense of belonging and job satisfaction as a whole. This sense of belonging, unfortunately, can't be instilled successfully enough when employees work from home.

The above is also true when it comes to motivational dimensions of culture. Another important aspect of company culture is being driven as a team towards a given objective. This is initially developed with a variety of team-building exercises, that can't conventionally be done virtually. Such motivational team spirit is specifically tested in times of losses and crises when the vision and culture of the company are prioritized and employees team up to work harder to meet the necessary goals. Communicating virtually from remote places does little to help develop this team bond. Motivation in the WFH conditions often depends on the worker, self-motivation is key to the successful accomplishment of this mode of work, being driven as a team is not prioritized thereby it is affecting company's culture, which otherwise thrives on employees coming together and keeping the life of their company alive, together.

In many cases, distance work leads to compromising of work culture. A well-organized office paves the way to a positive work ethic because a good conventional office layout sets a professional mindset, fosters strong team skills and team self-control, encourages competition, develops a positive work ethic at least because when an employee sees others working hard, he or she is motivated to do so as well, promotes punctuality (as opposed to the distant working which thrives on flexibility).

A study (Grenny, 2017) has found that remote workers feel isolated, shunned, and left out. Be it the lack of falling into work culture, or the lack of interaction among co-workers, which builds trust and a sense of belongingness– remote workers reported they were facing anxiety from feeling cut off. This takes a toll on the mental health of employees who work from home and does no good to the overall development of the company, or its culture.

There is a difference in the understanding of the processes of transformation from office work to working at home and from direct to remote communication in already established cultures in comparison with those that are being created under the new conditions. In all cases, however, remote forms of work and meetings bring noticeable and generally negative changes and challenges both to culture and in the field of motivation and leadership. These changes are combined with the increased feelings of burnout, fatigue and stress, experiences of isolation, fear for oneself and one's loved ones, frustration, anxiety, interpersonal tensions, and damaged relationships.

Realistically and pragmatically, there is no room for euphoria about working from home, neither in terms of efficiency and effectiveness nor in terms of individual motivation and satisfaction. On the other hand, we can expect with a very high degree of confidence that the

“old normality” is irrevocably obsolete and the future will not return us to the classic pre-Covid office ways of work. There is both economical and pragmatic-organizational sense (and trend) that the future that awaits us must include more forms and a given share of distance work at the expense of the classic one, but without the disappearance or underestimation of the latter. Organizational culture does not tolerate a vacuum, it arises and develops organically and spontaneously, regardless of whether someone has taken it into account and tried to influence it. This means that the environment created by the pandemic and the forced movement towards new forms of work will inevitably affect it, and the more focused and meaningfully the management approaches the issue, the greater the chances of successful cultural adaptation. The same is true for the arsenal of leadership and motivational policies and practices.

Many of the problems mentioned above can be solved comparatively well while satisfying the desire for more remote work on behalf of employers and employees. This can be done by moving towards more flexible mixed forms of employment, which imply a partial physical presence in the office combined with work from home in proportions that depend on the type of activity, the organizational specifics, and the surrounding cultural dominants. In any case, however, it seems imperative that the management focus its attention and efforts on the following.

- In the first place, there is a need to show sensitivity and understanding to the needs and concerns of employees and to provoke a sense of care and support in general in them.
- The above presupposes both awareness of purely technical problems when working at home (hardware, internet connectivity, etc.) and regulation of the technological dimensions of the communication process (number, frequency, duration, and time of meetings and written work). It is necessary to regulate the volume and the mode of written communication.
- Finding a specific form of realization of flexibility and combining attendance days and hours with work online. It is necessary to build a structure of norms for work and communication (for example, regarding the meetings in Teams, Zoom, the modes of sending e-mails, etc.). This can be done in parallel with the introduction of new cultural norms and rituals or adaptation of existing ones and it is not always necessary to be fully formalized or administered but to be achieved mainly by personal example.
- In cultures and motivational practices which the pandemic has found in good condition, it is necessary to consider how their success can be continued and strengthened in the conditions of the increased flexibility of work locations and the new ways of communication. The elements providing for physical presence in the work schedule will help for this. For the others, the new situation is a good opportunity to build new cultures, motivational practices, and leadership. The idea is to maintain or develop an understanding of a common goal, value priorities, meaning, inclusion, and a sense of community.
- The importance of communication is growing not so much in terms of duration but as a means of maintaining a sense of inclusion and maintaining and increasing levels of trust. There is also a need to focus on communication outside the narrow framework of working

(design, functional and other) teams and finding forms of effective interaction in a broader framework, e.g. of the organization as a whole.

- Another key cultural moment in the current situation is the emphasized and increased need for openness.

It should not be forgotten that the importance of culture, motivation, and leadership does not decrease, but increases with the new work schemes based on WFH. Efforts are basically limited to how to “translate” them into the language of the combination of presence and distance in each specific organizational and cultural situation – a task that has possible solutions, provided that there is an awareness of the existence of the task itself.

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