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## **IT TOOLS TO SUPPORT REMOTE WORK IN MODERN FINANCIAL CORPORATIONS AS ILLUSTRATED BY COMPANY X**

### **Introduction**

Year 2020 was a period of challenge both for employees and employers all over the world who were forced by the pandemic to adapt to remote work when it was only possible. The computerization of work and the transfer of the forms of its provision outside of company premises was a gradual and slow process. However, the new situation very quickly transformed the existing traditional model of work into remote work and it set new trends and forms of work provision. Moreover, it had a significant impact on the importance of information technologies that enabled remote work in many companies, in particular in corporations providing financial services.

The aim of the article is to analyze the use of IT tools to support remote work in modern financial corporations on the example of company X<sup>1</sup>.

### **1. Present trends of changes in work organization**

The COVID-19 epidemic<sup>2</sup> significantly influenced the attitude of employers to the location of work and forced them to accelerate the process of transitioning to work outside of company offices and – due to the restrictions and recommendations to work from home – to switch to fully remote work. This mode of work contributed to the continuity of operation in numerous companies, including the ones that did not consider the implementation of such solutions before the pandemic. As a result, the issue of legal regulations enabling alternative ways of employment and work is increasingly more frequently discussed. Moreover, because of the universal access to high-speed internet connections and IT tools that enable employees to provide work, they became used to working from home to such an extent that they treat it as

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<sup>1</sup> The article is a synthesis of research conducted within the framework of the master's thesis of Katarzyna Mruk-Staroń supervised by Dr Dominika Woźny – the thesis was defended on 17.05.2022 at the School of Banking and Management in Krakow.

<sup>2</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic started as an epidemic on 17.11.2019 in China, and on 11.03.2020 it was considered by WHO as a pandemic.

something natural and obvious and which enables them to save time and money on commuting. Nevertheless, the right to work from home during pandemic, and not only then, without adequate legal regulations is only a temporary privilege. That is why both EU and other member states are working on appropriate regulations of remote work within the law system. At present, legislation work is carried out in Poland on the implementation of the Work-Life Balance EU Directive which will finally regulate the rules of implementing remote work in our country. At present, there are only regulations on teleworking.

The concept of telework started in 1960s in The English FI Group<sup>3</sup> in Great Britain. Female employees were allowed to provide software services from home. A decade later, due to the oil crisis in US<sup>4</sup>, telework was also accepted there. The term *telework* was used for the first time in 1972 by Jack Schiff in the Washington Post<sup>5</sup> article. However, it is Jack M. Nilles, the owner of JALA International who worked on the reduction of car transport and commuting fuel costs, who is considered to be the precursor of this form of employment<sup>6</sup>.

Even at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, telework was a very rare and almost nonexistent phenomenon in Poland<sup>7</sup>. Along with numerous programs popularizing telework, such as *Eastern Europe E-work* or *Telework. National promotional and training program for entrepreneurs*<sup>8</sup>, legislative work was under way to introduce legal framework regulating this type of employment. Legislative work on the introduction of telework in Poland was conducted within the Social Round Table Dialogue for European Integration in cooperation with the Solidarity trade union, OPZZ trade unions, the Polish Confederation of Private Employers, the Confederation of Polish Employers and the Polish Craft Association, and it resulted in the amendment of the Labor Code of 24 August 2007 enabling the provision of telework based on contracts of employment, civil law contracts, outwork contracts and self-employment. The employment in the form of telework was regulated by Art. 67 (together with subsections) of the Labor Code which is consistent with the assumptions of the EU Framework Agreement on Telework<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> S. Karbowska, *Telepraca jako przedmiot porozumienia ramowego z dnia 16 lipca 2002 r.*, „Zeszyty Prawnicze” 2008, Vol. 8 No. 1, p. 207.

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem, p. 206.

<sup>5</sup> M. Sidor-Rządkowska, *Kształtowanie przestrzeni pracy. Praca w biurze, praca zdalna, coworking*, Wolters Kluwer, Warszawa 2021, p. 60.

<sup>6</sup> J. Unterschütz, *Pojęcia telepracy i pracy zdalnej. Dotychczasowe doświadczenia i regulacje prawne*, [in:] M. Mędrala (ed.), *Praca zdalna w polskim systemie prawnym*, Wolters Kluwer, Warszawa 2021, p. 13.

<sup>7</sup> P. Wróbel, D. Jendza, *Telepraca – regulacje prawne a praktyka rynku pracy*, „e-mentor” 2018, No. 3(75), p. 56.

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem, p. 209.

Both the Agreement and the Polish Labor Code assume that the provision of telework must be accounted for and presented in a digital form<sup>10</sup>, voluntary in nature<sup>11</sup>, and the working conditions of teleworkers should be the same as for the employees working at the employer's premises<sup>12</sup>. The employer is responsible for the protection of data, the provision of adequate trainings, and teleworkers benefit from the same rights as comparable workers at the employer's premises. The employer is also responsible for the protection of the teleworker's privacy, the provision of the necessary equipment and the protection of the teleworker's occupational safety and health<sup>13</sup>. The teleworker is obliged to manage the organization of his/her working time<sup>14</sup>.

Apart from telework, there are also other forms of work outside of employer's premises, such as *home office*, i.e. fully remote work from outside of the premises or the hybrid work model in which there is some flexibility concerning the location of work. The home office or the remote work model are not legally regulated in Poland and working from outside of the employer's premises that is not teleworking is accepted only under the so-called Covid Act. *Home office*, contrary to fully remote work, is characterized by the fact that work is occasionally performed from outside the employer's premises and the employee is free to choose the location and frequency of this form of work. The employer is interested in the results of work and not in the location from which it is provided.

At the beginning of the first quarter of 2020, Grafton Recruitment and CBRE conducted a survey among employees on their preferences concerning the location of work and it turned out that as many as 90% employees would not

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<sup>10</sup> J. Unterschütz, *Pojęcia...*, op. cit., p.19.

<sup>11</sup> *Framework Agreement on Telework*, [https://resourcecentre.etuc.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/Telework%202002\\_Framework%20Agreement%20-%20EN.pdf](https://resourcecentre.etuc.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/Telework%202002_Framework%20Agreement%20-%20EN.pdf) (accessed: 5 June 2021).

<sup>12</sup> *Teleworking*, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=LEGISSUM:c10131&from=EN> (accessed; 7 June 2021).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*.

imagine a transition to a permanent work-from-home model<sup>15</sup>, which was probably caused by the fact that their places of residence were not adapted to work. On the other hand, the survey of ERGO Hestia showed that almost 80% of remote employees liked this form but they would like to work this way only occasionally<sup>16</sup>. Such an opportunity is provided by the hybrid model which assumes a combination of remote and stationary work, where work teams are divided into ones that work in the employer's premises and outside of them on a rotating basis according to a previously agreed schedule or the employees have a free choice of remote work with a constant possibility to work from the premises<sup>17</sup>.

Both employees and employers face several challenges related to the new forms of work. They include the organization of work out of the company's premises, the development of optimal ways of communication between superiors and inferiors, adequate training systems, work effectiveness and the integration of staff. Despite these numerous challenges, one should be aware that we are witnessing historical changes that will soon characterize the labor market and become a new normal.

## **2. The increasing significance of IT in a company**

The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting transition to remote work had an obvious influence on the increase in the significance of IT in the organization of work. Modern information technologies are applied in many organizations that want to be successful and competitive on the labor market. However, one should remember that it is not the possession of complex IT systems that determines company's success but the capacity to use effectively the acquired resources<sup>18</sup>.

Advanced IT technology enables efficient operation of organizations and results in their competitiveness only when the IT tools at their disposal are practical and properly used to analyze, process information and improve processes and their management<sup>19</sup>. When the tools

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<sup>15</sup> M. Sidor-Rządkowska, *Kształtowanie...*, op. cit., p. 46.

<sup>16</sup> D. Senda, *HR OdNowa*, „Personel Plus” 2021, No. 3, p. 16.

<sup>17</sup> A. Zawadka, *Praca w modelu hybrydowym. Jak skutecznie ją wprowadzić? Case study Livespace*, <https://hrbusinesspartner.pl/arttykul/praca-w-modelu-hybrydowym-jak-skutecznie-ja-wprowadzic-case-study-livespace> (accessed: 10.09.2021).

<sup>18</sup> N. Michałek, *Znaczenie technologii informacyjnej w zarządzaniu przedsiębiorstwem*, „Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego” 2011, No. 650, p. 309.

<sup>19</sup> Ibidem, p. 303.

are entrusted to adequately qualified employees, they can contribute to the increase in the staff effectiveness, the improvement of their work management and its results<sup>20</sup>.

In 2019 and 2020, the Polish Economic Institute conducted a two-step survey on the use of modern technologies in companies before and during the pandemic. The first step was conducted in 1050 companies that differed in terms of size and the sector of activity, while the second step was conducted in 400 companies<sup>21</sup>. The first-step survey showed that before the COVID-19 pandemic, 73% of the companies did not allocate funds for the purchase of modern technologies and 47% pointed out that the share of the use of IT in their organizations was high<sup>22</sup>. The second stage of the survey showed that as many as 91% of the companies used at least one modern technology and 10% of big organizations implemented the systems of remote work management during the pandemic<sup>23</sup>. It should be emphasized that the change, which was insignificant, took place within one year of the announcement of the state of epidemiological emergency in Poland and as many as 27% of the surveyed organizations<sup>24</sup> declared that they were going to introduce similar management systems after the pandemic.

The year 2020 brought significant changes in the implementation of IT tools in companies. Enterprises began to introduce new tools to communicate with customers, to manage remote work and enable their staff to work from home. The lockdown accelerated the introduction of changes in companies and the implementation of numerous new solutions to facilitate work in the new conditions. The ability to adapt to the new reality and to raise funds for technological transformation paved the way for many companies to survive when it was necessary in to immediately transfer work from the premises to the virtual world, which required adequate technological facilities, particularly in such IT areas as the cloud and cybersecurity<sup>25</sup>. The first enables the access to the organization's data and the latter is responsible for the security of the data. The figures collected by Bitdefender show that in the first year of the pandemic as many as 86% of IT specialists<sup>26</sup> noticed a growing number of cyberattacks and attempts to breach information security.

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<sup>20</sup> I. Orzoł, *Znaczenie współczesnych technologii informacyjnych w zarządzaniu polskimi przedsiębiorstwami* [in:] Konferencja Innowacje w Zarządzaniu i Inżynierii Produkcji, Polskie Towarzystwo Zarządzania Produkcją, Zakopane 2010, p. 321.

<sup>21</sup> J. Nowak, M. Wieteska (ed.), *Nowoczesne technologie w przedsiębiorstwach przed, w trakcie i po pandemii COVID-19*, Polski Instytut Ekonomiczny, Warszawa 2020, p. 8.

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem, p. 5.

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>25</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>26</sup> G. Juszczak, *Cyberbezpieczeństwo w dobie pandemii*, <https://snt.pl/cyberbezpieczenstwo-w-dobie-pandemii-problem-globalny-towarzyszaczy-przyspieszonej-cyfryzacji/> (accessed: 30.09.2021).

The introduction of IT technologies to companies involves barriers in the four following areas: economic, technological, organizational and social<sup>27</sup>. Such factors have to be considered as: the implementation costs, the reluctance to bear the maintenance or service costs, low infrastructure efficiency, low software flexibility, the lack of system functionalities, the size and variety of departments, changing regulations, dispersion of company branches and the lack of system integration, employee reluctance, resistance to change, insufficient competencies of the staff and inappropriate attitude to new systems. However, after these factors are considered and adequate preventive measures are taken as the early stage, the computerization of business will result in measurable benefits.

### **3. The application of IT tools for remote work in financial Corporation X – analysis of the authors' own survey research**

The aim of the survey research was to assess the use of IT tools for remote work in a modern financial Corporation X and to verify the effectiveness of their implementation with the consideration of their number, the ease of use and variety.

Three research hypotheses were formulated:

1. Women more often than men report that IT tools used in Company X are either user-unfriendly or difficult to use.
2. A vast majority of the surveyed Company X staff prefer remote work with the use of the new communication tools.
3. Employees with a longer (over 7 years) work experience prefer more often traditional training methods with a trainer at company premises rather than trainings with the use of IT tools.

The survey was conducted among 50 workers of the Company's finished project on 18-25.10.2021. Before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, they did not have a previous experience with remote work as the contract with the client obliged them to work only at the premises of the office inaccessible to the workers of other projects. What is more, they worked in a separated ICT network dedicated solely to the service that was provided to this particular client.

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<sup>27</sup> T. Parys, *Scenariusze wdrożenia a bariery wdrożeniowe zintegrowanych systemów informatycznych*, [in:] R. Knosala (ed.), *Innowacje w zarządzaniu i inżynierii produkcji*, Oficyna Wydawnicza Polskiego Towarzystwa Zarządzania Produkcją, Opole 2016, p. 849.

The survey questionnaire was sent off electronically in the form of a Google form to all the project workers with a full anonymity of the respondents. They were asked to complete the form on a voluntary basis during their free time. The questionnaire included 17 single- and multiple-choice, closed-ended and semi-open-ended questions. They concerned the respondents' previous experience with remote work, their current feelings about this form of work, and the IT tools used in their work. Due to a limited volume of the article, only selected results of the survey are presented below.

The respondents included 31 women and 19 men. A vast majority of the employees (70%), 19 women and 16 men were in the age range of 26-35 years. Thus, it may be assumed that the respondents were mainly young people. 27 respondents worked in Company X for up to 7 years, while 23 of them worked for 7 – 14 years.

In the survey, the analysis concerned three IT tools used in the team remote work in Company X: communication tools, file sharing tools and work time management tools.

The respondents were asked to indicate the three most frequently used *communication tools* (out of MS Teams, Webex, Skype, Outlook, telephone, Messenger/Facebook, other) and *file sharing tools* (out of MS One Drive, network disc, file sharing through communicators such as MS Teams, Microsoft SharePoint, Dropbox, other) that they used in their remote work on a daily basis.

With regard to *communication tools*, 100% of workers declared using most often Microsoft Teams; 42% of men and 29% of women also used telephone and only 16% of men and as many as 39% of women admitted to the frequent use of the Outlook. Other common communicators such as Facebook and Messenger were used only by 5% of men and 3 % of women.

The most preferably used file sharing tools, both in the case of men and women, is MS Teams. This was indicated by 89% of men and 81% of women. Other popular tools are network discs and Microsoft Sharepoint – both are used by 79% of men, while network disc is more popular among women than Microsoft Sharepoint. The first tool is used by 65% of women and the latter by 55%. MS One Drive is the least popular tool; nevertheless, it is also frequently used by as many as 53% of men and 45% of women.

In Company X, it is obligatory for every employee to register work time with the use of three tools: PROMPT (which records the time spent on particular tasks), Shifting (where the employees record the time of starting and finishing work every day as well as their absences) and Clarity (through which the employees report to the HR department the hours worked to be

paid). Because of the above obligation, these tools are used on a daily basis by 100% of the project workers.

The respondents' opinion on each of the groups of IT tools used in remote work is given in Table 1.

**Table 1. Opinion of Company X employees on IT tools used in remote work**

| Opinion on the tool              | Gender | Type of the tool |                |                     |
|----------------------------------|--------|------------------|----------------|---------------------|
|                                  |        | to communicate   | to share files | to manage work time |
| easy to use/user-friendly        | F      | 97%              | 81%            | 52%                 |
|                                  | M      | 100%             | 89%            | 74%                 |
| difficult to use/user-unfriendly | F      | 3%               | 19%            | 48%                 |
|                                  | M      | 0%               | 11%            | 26%                 |

Source: Based on the authors' own survey research results.

The survey results confirm the assumption in hypothesis 1 that women more often than men report that IT tools used in the project are difficult to use or are user-unfriendly. Work time management tools are the worst according to the respondents and as many as 48% of women and 26% of men complain about them. The respondents complain much less about file sharing tools: this category is negatively evaluated by 19% of women and 1% of men. Communication tools are definitely the best rated; only 3% of women complain about them and they enjoy only positive opinions of men.

To verify hypothesis 2, Company X employees were asked about a preferred type of contact with co-workers and with the immediate superior and about their feelings about remote work.

The presentation of responses to the question about the preferred contact type with co-workers and the immediate superior is given in Table 2.

As it turns out from the workers' responses (Table 2), only 26% of respondents prefer direct contact with co-workers in the office and 24% want to have such a contact with their immediate superior. e-Mail contact, both with co-workers and the immediate superior is preferred by 4% of respondents, while 2% of them prefer a telephone contact. The employees definitely prefer contacts via such remote communication tools as Skype or MS Teams (the so-

called new generation communication tools). This type of communication with co-workers and with the immediate superior is preferred by 68% and 70% of respondents, respectively.

**Table 2. The preferred contact type with co-workers and immediate superior**

| <b>Preferred contact type</b>                    | <b>co-workers</b> | <b>immediate superior</b> |
|--------------------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|
| F2F, in the office                               | 26%               | 24%                       |
| e-mail                                           | 4%                | 4%                        |
| telephone                                        | 2%                | 2%                        |
| Remote communication tools, e.g. MS Teams, Skype | 68%               | 70%                       |

Source: Based on the authors' own survey research results

The employees of Company X do not only prefer to have contacts with co-workers and the superior using remote communication tools but also prefer remote work. Only 8% of the surveyed workers definitely prefer to work from the office while as many as 46% declared that they could work remotely all the time and 44% could work remotely but would like to be sometimes able to go to the office.

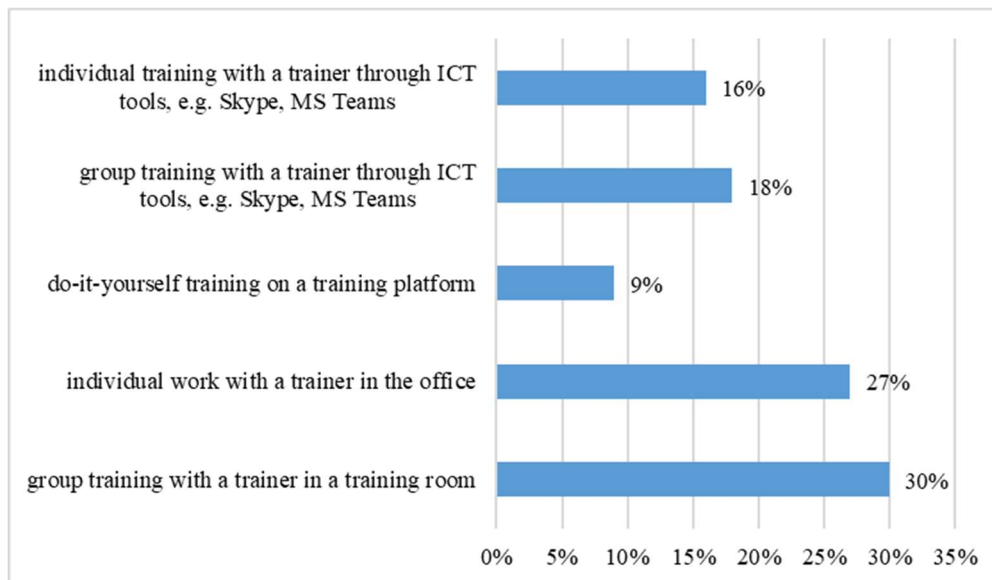
On the basis of these respondents' responses, hypothesis 2 should be considered true, i.e. a vast majority of the surveyed employees of Company X prefer remote work with the use of the new generation communication tools.

The last hypothesis studies the impact of work experience on training preferences and assumes that employees with a longer (over 7 years) work experience more often prefer traditional training methods with a trainer at company premises rather than trainings with the use of IT tools. Graph 1 presents the types of trainings that are preferred by workers with 7-14 years of work experience.

In general, the surveyed employees with 7-14 years of work experience would definitely like to participate in traditional training in the office premises. This probably results from the fact that after working on a closed project without the possibility to work remotely, they were used to such type of training. Group trainings with a trainer accounted for as many as 30 % of responses in this group. The second preferred form of training (27%) were individual trainings with a trainer in the office. Thus, the response rate for trainings in a traditional form was 57%. Nevertheless, it can be noticed that the employees with 7-14 years of work experience tend to accept group and individual trainings through IT/ICT tools. This type of trainings was indicated

by 18% and 16% of respondents, respectively. Do-it-yourself trainings on a training platform were the least popular with this group of employees (7-14 years of work experience) as only 9% of respondents indicated this type of training as a preferred one.

**Graph 1. Training preferences of employees with 7-14 years of work experience**



Source: Based on the authors' own survey research results.

Thus, the survey results confirm hypothesis 3 that the employees with an over 7 year-work experience definitely prefer the traditional form of training with a trainer in the office.

## Conclusions

The accelerating pandemic-related process of transition to remote work resulted in the appearance of several new IT tools to support this form of working. Consequently, the employees faced new reality; they had to acquire new skills and cope with the issues concerning, among others, the use of these tools.

The analysis of the conducted survey research leads to the conclusion that Company X uses many IT tools in remote work and the employees seem to be familiar with them. Many of them are used to improve everyday work, automate some processes and develop employees. It turns out, however, that there are several tools to manage the same areas. For example, at least three tools are used to register work time and share the files that the employees are working on. The work on each of these tools is time consuming both for the employees and the immediate superior. Therefore, it is necessary to consider reducing the number of these tools, which would

improve everyday work and decrease the amount of time needed to work on them. Another benefit of reducing the number of IT tools would be the increase in the productivity of employees, who could spend the saved time on work or training. Moreover, more attention should be paid to the training of women as these tools are difficult to use for them. Improving the use of IT tools in everyday work is crucial as they seem to be significant elements of Company X functioning; IT tools are indispensable as the majority of the project workers prefer remote work and a remote form of contact with the co-workers and the superior. However, there is a group of employees who are in favor of the traditional form of work (i.e. in the office premises) and of traditional trainings in particular; this concerns the group with 7-14 years of work experience in Company X. Thus, it is recommended that Company X should introduce a hybrid work model which would not only provide the employees with some flexibility as regards the location of work but also ensure the need to partially perform duties in the office. This will contribute to relationship development in project teams as well as to the choice of the optimal location of work.

It can be concluded that the new standards of work are not temporary and will most probably remain on the labor market for ever. Therefore, the acquired new skills and experience with the use of IT tools in remote work will be necessary for employees in further work. Thus, it seems justified to conduct further research and analysis on the use of IT tools in remote work.

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### **Abstract**

The article presents the analysis of IT tools supporting remote work in a financial corporation with a particular consideration of company X. Current trends are presented of changes in company work organization that resulted mainly from the epidemic situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors note an increase in the importance of information technology in modern organizations. Moreover, on the basis of the analysis of the authors' own survey research, the article presents the use of IT tools for remote work in financial Corporation X. Finally, conclusions and recommendations are presented that are the result of the study of the literature on the subject and the effects of the authors' own survey research concerning the use of IT tools in the daily work of the employees in company X .

### **Key words**

Remote work, IT tools, organization of work, trainings, financial corporation.