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COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES AND INTERNAL COMMUNICATION IN AN ORGANIZATION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

TECHNOLOGIE KOMUNIKACYJNE A KOMUNIKACJA WEWNĘTRZNA W ORGANIZACJI W CZASIE PANDEMII COVID-19

Abstract: During the Covid-19 pandemic, communication between employees was mostly carried out remotely and was carried out using solutions in the field of communication technologies. This dependence on the communication tools used often translated into the quality of the communication process and its effectiveness. In addition, significant differences between remote communication and internal communication generate problems and have a negative impact on the commitment and motivation of employees. The aim of this study is to present selected aspects related to the use of communication technologies in internal communication. The considerations are based on the literature on the subject and selected studies on remote work and internal communication during the Covid-19 pandemic. The conducted desk research analysis shows that companies implementing remote work should focus their activities not only on the implementation of communication technology solutions, but also on a change in the approach to creating the internal communication process. Our contribution to the discussion consists in pointing out that the process of internal communication requires a new approach to its creation.

Keywords: communication technologies, internal communication, remote work, pandemia Covid-19.

Streszczenie: W czasie pandemii Covid-19 komunikacja między pracownikami odbywała się w większości na odległość i była realizowana z wykorzystaniem rozwiązań z zakresu technologii komunikacyjnych. Ta zależność od stosowanych narzędzi komunikacyjnych często przekładała się na jakość procesu komunikacji i jego skuteczność. Ponadto znaczne różnice między komunikacją zdalną a komunikacją wewnętrzną generują problemy i negatywnie wpływają na zaangażowanie i motywację pracowników. Celem niniejszego opracowania jest przedstawienie wybranych aspektów związanych z wykorzystaniem technologii komunikacyjnych w komunikacji wewnętrznej. Rozważania oparto na literaturze przedmiotu oraz wybranych badaniach dotyczących pracy zdalnej i komunikacji wewnętrznej podczas pandemii Covid-19. Z przeprowadzonej analizy *desk research* wynika, że firmy wdrażające pracę zdalną powinny skoncentrować swoje działania nie tylko na wdrażaniu rozwiązań teleinformatycznych, ale także na zmianie podejścia do tworzenia procesu komunikacji wewnętrznej. Wkład w dyskusję polega na zwróceniu uwagi, że proces komunikacji wewnętrznej wymaga nowego podejścia do jej tworzenia.

Słowa kluczowa: technologie komunikacyjne, komunikacja wewnętrzna, praca zdalna, pandemia Covid-19.

1. Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic contributed to the popularization of remote work, which in the current situation has become the dominant form of work organization for many organizations. Remote work, especially in the form of telework, is known, but until the outbreak of the pandemic, it was not as popular or widespread. An important aspect of teleworking is communication, which is crucial to reaping the benefits of this form of work. Unfortunately, remote communication has its destructive nature, which results, among others, from the emergence of many constraints for both the sender and the recipient of the information. These limitations include the forms, types and elements of the communication process used. On the other hand, thanks to remote communication, it is possible to work anywhere and anytime. Communication itself is a communication tool and a process that plays a significant role in the performance of basic management functions. Effective, properly conducted communication is the basis for building interpersonal relations between the stakeholders of the organization and serves learning and influences the development of employees (Wach-Kąkolewicz, 2011). Thanks to the transfer of information and communication between the members of the organization, the functioning of each unit is possible. Effective communication requires: having appropriate skills, knowledge of forms of communication, barriers to information flow, determinants of communication processes, as well as tools enabling the exchange of messages.

Communication in an organization is primarily the transfer of information from one person to another (Griffin, 2021). This process and its transparency have an impact on the understanding of the defined goals of the unit and the actions taken by

its employees. In addition, the proper flow of information combined with dialogue affects, among others: motivating subordinates, their involvement in the life of the organization or creating organizational culture. More and more entities are aware that their success also depends on motivated and satisfied employees (Klimek--Michno & Marciniak, 2017).

Remote work significantly hindered the communication process and in many cases emphasized its destructive impact on building relationships, employee engagement, mutual understanding and development of both the organization and employees themselves.

The aim of this study is to present selected aspects related to the use of communication technologies in internal communication. The considerations are based on the literature on the subject and selected studies on remote work and internal communication during the Covid-19 pandemic.

2. Remote work and the challenges of internal communication

Remote work has become quite common with the advent of Covid-19. Its implementation was and is possible thanks to the use of communication and information technology solutions that enable work outside the employer's premises. Remote work is not the same form of work as defined in the Polish Labor Code and is called teleworking. Teleworking is regulated in the Polish Labor Code and, in accordance with the provisions, work may be performed regularly outside the workplace, using electronic means of communication within the meaning of the provisions on the provision of electronic services (teleworking). On the other hand, remote work is not regulated by law. Its dissemination became possible due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Remote work in Poland has been regulated in accordance with the acts that entered into force as a package of acts under the so-called "Anti-crisis shield". What connects both forms of work organization is the fact that they are performed outside the employer's seat (Sidor-Rządkowska, 2021). One of the big challenges in remote work is internal communication, and thus the cooperation of employees. Remote communication differs from internal communication, which is primarily based on direct relationships between employees.

Internal communication consists in establishing and maintaining relations between the organization, supervisory authorities and employees in order to develop a sense of community (Johnston, Beatson, & Lings, 2015) and ensures the proper implementation of tasks (Potocki, 2011) Active contact with employees has a significant impact on the efficiency of the organization and the effectiveness of tasks by individual employees, as well as the loyalty and motivation of employees. Internal communication pursues goals such as (Potocki, 2011):
• learning about the vision, mission and goals of the organization,
• informs about the course of business,
• facilitates making decisions, their transfer and justification to subordinates,

- facilitates the development of employees by indicating various possibilities,
- facilitates effective problem solving and affects the speed of their solution,
- promotes behaviors and attitudes that support the development of the organization.

The effects of an efficiently functioning internal communication system include (Bogusz, 2015):

- employees' identification with the organization and its values
- knowledge flow;
- understanding and increasing involvement in implemented projects;
- reducing the risk of errors made by employees;
- building organizational culture;
- credible image.

Effective communication is critical to an organization's success in the marketplace. If employees provide information ineffectively, it exposes the organization not only to a waste of time and money. The quality of communication also affects the development of organizations and employees, their commitment to work (Mishra et al., 2014) and the level of identification with the organization (Smidts, Pruyn, & Cees van Riel, 2001).

The role and importance of social factors, and in the context of communication, mainly those related to the so-called non-verbal elements of the communication process, it is very important in remote work and teleworking. The use of appropriate remote communication tools, such as e-mail, mobile phone or internet platform, significantly affects the speed of information transferred and the ability to perform certain tasks regardless of the place or time of people involved in the communication process (recipient or sender). Thanks to the use of ICT solutions, it is possible to maintain the parameter of the speed of transmitted information. On the other hand, the effectiveness and efficiency of the communication process depends on the factors that are easiest to maintain in direct communication. An important role in the communication process is played by non-verbal signals, the climate of the communication process as well as the frequency and quality of the information provided. When transmitting information, we speak, listen and observe in order to assess whether the message is coherent, whether the sender and recipient of the information actively participate in the conversation. The reception of verbal and non-verbal signals allows for the correct understanding of the information provided. Earlier experiences resulting from the use of teleworking have shown that the possibilities and functionalities, as well as the availability of ICT solutions or tools, are the basis for the virtualization of economic processes, but do not fully determine the communication process. Until the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the prevalence of virtualization of economic processes related to, among others, to the increase in the number of people employed in the form of teleworking, schools offering e-learning or the creation of only virtual banks, it was rather low. In the case of banks, electronic accounts created on the basis of traditional accounts are still popular, as they enable remote management of funds through the so-called

Internet banking. This situation resulted from the fact that the use of remote communication technology is also destructive. In February 2013, Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer banned remote work. She argued that she wanted to provide the best work environment where communication and collaboration are important. To achieve this status, all employees should work side by side and all should be present in the offices. Believes that quick team collaboration and better communication between teams is unattainable for people working remotely. However, this decision was met with the surprise and irritation of employees who started discussing work-life balance, especially in the context of teleworking. It is worth noting that the previous employer, Marissa Mayer, Google, perceived remote work as a destructive factor for employee productivity (Jażdżewski, 2013; Koprowska, n.d.). The negative perception of remote communication is due to the number of human senses involved in the communication process. In remote communication, most of the information transmitted is presented by means of text, which is devoid of emotions, feelings, meeting atmosphere resulting from the place and context of the environment. This, in turn, is not conducive to building interpersonal relationships and has an impact on the efficiency of the employee and his involvement in the work process. Not being able to see and hear the other party's reaction (facial expression, tone of voice, body posture) greatly reduces feedback. Another disadvantage of remote communication is delayed feedback, which reduces the dynamics of interaction and is not beneficial for the participants of the communication process (Smoląg, 2016).

Therefore, until the outbreak of the pandemic, conditions related to the development of ICT led to the emergence of new forms of task implementation, but mainly as alternative solutions, complementing these proven, traditional mechanisms of operation. On the other hand, the situation that arose in 2020 did not give many organizations a choice and what so far was only an alternative has now become a necessity. Future Business Institute (FBI) research has shown a number of problems that require urgent solutions, especially difficulties with internal and external communication. According to this report, 57% of respondents believe that maintaining team spirit, communication and relationships is a big challenge for remote working. In addition, remote work creates new challenges for creating internal communication processes. 51% of respondents say that internal communication needs to be improved because it generates a lot of misunderstanding remotely (Raport Future Institute Business, 2020).

The respondents also indicated aspects that require improvement. They included: the quality of Internet connections−35%, software tools−26% and supervision of performed tasks−26%. 20% believe that choosing tools for remote work is a challenge. As the authors of the Future Business Institute report indicate, the problem with internal communication in remote work is one of the most important business challenges. They emphasize that communication devoid of non-verbal messages (facial expressions, posture, gestures, tone of voice) generate a lot of interpretative, emotional and perceptual distortions. Eliminating interpretive and

emotional distortions requires investing in training in effective communication. In turn, eliminating perceptual distortions requires improving the communication technology used in the communication process remotely (Raport Future Institute Business, 2020).

321 respondents participated in the FBI survey, 51% of whom were employees and associates of companies employing more than 50 people. 27% are employees of companies employing from 10 to 50 people, and micro and small companies accounted for 22%. The service industries were the most numerous in the entire group. These were companies related to IT, Internet and modern technologies (27%), finance (20%), media (17%) and education (12%). The survey shows that before the pandemic, only 4% had been working remotely for a year and 17% for two years. 30% of the respondents did not work remotely at all and 46% sporadically and accidentally. In turn, during the pandemic, 73% of respondents work continuously, and 9% perform half of the work time remotely. Only 7% of respondents do not work remotely (Raport Future Institute Business, 2020).

3. Communication technologies in remote work

Tools supporting communication and overcoming the distance between employees include: e-mail, instant messaging, videoconferencing, the Internet, Intranet and all mobile devices enabling communication (Jurga, 2010). The role of these tools is to implement the communication process, provide current information, post press releases, personnel procedures, event calendars, meetings, training sessions, photos, and important events in the organization.

The tools supporting remote communication include:
- e-mail as the primary channel of information transfer,
- videoconferences as a meeting support tool (e.g. Zoom, MS Teams, ClickMeeting),
- messengers that allow you to quickly contact a selected person or group of people (e.g. Messenger, WhatsApp),
- tools for creating mind maps that allow you to brainstorm or share knowledge (Coggle, Mindmup),
- solutions supporting joint work on documents or projects (e.g. Trello or Google Drive).

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic contributed to the evolution of remote work solutions. There are many free solutions dedicated to remote communication, collaboration and teamwork. In the initial phase of the pandemic, we witnessed the development of tools dedicated to remote work in accordance with the needs and expectations of users. The use of "raising your hand" during an on-line meeting helps to conduct the discussion and allows you to smoothly manage the discussion. The monotony of meetings can be eliminated by tools for creative team work, such as Jamboard (Kostro, n.d.). This virtual board allows many people to cooperate simultaneously on one board or each person's work separately on his board with

the possibility of a quick comparison of the effects of work. Taking into account the importance of internal communication in the organization, the functionality of these solutions should combine the possibility of sending information (e-mail function), text messenger, and also enable audio calls and videoconferences (Komunikacja w czasach pracy zdalnej, 2020). The selection and functionality of these tools has a significant impact on the internal communication process and work efficiency.

According to the Antal survey, which was carried out using the CAWI method on a sample of 1069 specialists and managers in April 2020, it indicated tools influencing work efficiency (Table 1). Traditional methods of remote communication, which include e-mail (97%) and telephone (83%), are in the foreground. More than half of the respondents 54% use Skype and 49% use Microsoft Teams, 25% use WhatsApp and only 18% from Zoom and Messenger (Raport Antal, 2020, p. 14). In the same report, the respondents were of the opinion that when performing remote duties, specialists and managers most often lack social relations (74%) (Raport Antal, 2020).

Tabele 1. Communication tools used by remote workers

Type of tool	% remote workers
E-mail	97
Telephone	83
Skype	54
MS Teams	49
WhatsApp	25
Zoom	18
FB, Messenger	18
Google Meets	11
Slack	5

Source: (Raport Antal, 2020, p. 14).

According to the Remote-How report, the situation is different at the supranational level. The most popular remote work tool turned out to be Zoom (63%), Slack (58%), Skype (35%) and MS Teams (27%) (Instytut Badawczy IPC sp. z o.o., 2020).

The data from the Avaya study show the importance and necessity of investing in solutions facilitating communication with employees and group work. This opinion is shared by as many as 75% of enterprises and 80% implement tools enabling employees to new ways of working. 66% of enterprises with 251–500 employees have pushed collaboration and communication technology higher on their priority list. As many as 57% believe that using remote communication causes some difficulties and problems. The study shows that companies are investing in technology that supports communication and collaboration. 65% supplement their systems with videoconferencing solutions, 54% add software for chat and messaging and 53% implement tools that facilitate collaborative design (Raport Avaya, 2020).

The selected results of the presented reports on the use of communication technologies in remote work clearly show that enterprises are trying to adapt to the current reality. They implement solutions in the field of communication technologies. In addition, they make collaboration and communication technologies high on their list of priorities. However, despite these activities, research emphasizes that employees perceive remote communication as a factor generating many problems. In addition, the lack of social relations during the performance of duties is a considerable challenge for remote employees. The universality of remote work has highlighted aspects related to the socialization of employees and internal communication, which require a different approach than in the traditional model of work.

4. Conclusion

The issue of remote work has become a permanent part of our reality. According to the authors of the FBI report, remote work is one of the key elements of the digitization of the economy and social life. The universality of remote work is of particular importance for the evolution of digitization and is conducive to the familiarization of digital technologies and the development of digital competences (Raport Future Institute Business, 2020). Enterprises more and more often decide to implement new solutions in communication technologies and more and more often treat these activities as a priority. It is worth noting that, according to research by Avaya, 52 percent. increased investment in groupware software. And 71% of those who make technology decisions believe that the Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of new technologies in their enterprises (Raport Avaya, 2020).

Remote communication forces, apart from the implementation of communication technologies, significant changes in the approach to creating a new work space. These include: proper selection of communication tools and channels, employee training, taking into account the needs of employees or an on-line meeting plan. It is also very important to have access to information relevant to employees and supporting them in the performance of their professional duties. The Covid-19 pandemic has certainly accelerated not only the universality of the communication technology tools used, but also allowed the development of digital competences. The results presented in this study show that work efficiency depends on the selection and functionality of the tools used. At the same time, they show that remote forms of work pose new challenges in the field of internal communication, leadership, creating organizational culture in order to strengthen ties between employees and interpersonal reactions.

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