



STUDIES ABOUT CHANGING THE LABOR MARKET AFTER COVID-19 PANDEMIC CONTEXT

¹Oana-Maria Asiminicesei, ²Ramona Simionescu, ³Alexandra Abăceaoe

¹Associate Professor, ²Assistant Professor, ³MSc Student

¹Faculty of Electrical Engineering, Department of Electrical Measurements and Electrotechnical Materials

¹"Gherorghe Asachi" Technical University of Iasi, Iasi, Romania

Abstract : The COVID-19 pandemic interrupted life suddenly triggering massive problems in all aspects of life, but especially in the labor market leading to the emergence of various arrangements, so that a large part of employees and companies had to adapt to the change and continue their activity. These rapid changes, especially the transition to working from office to working from home, have radically changed the face of the labor market and brought about changes in how the employers and employees relate to this type of work. The current paper aims to analyze the way of changing type of working in the pandemic context, the abrupt transition from the classic way of working to working from home and analyzes the challenges that the employees encountered. The work is based on a questionnaire applied to 100 employees from various work environments, both from private and public sector in Romania.

IndexTerms - Pandemic, hybrid work, work from home, work-life balance.

I. INTRODUCTION

The multitude of measures taken immediately after the start of pandemic period, including local and national lockdowns, social distancing measures, border closures and quarantines, forced many firms to adapt their business models at short time.

The labor market had to reorganize quickly after the start the COVID 19 pandemic. In the labor market, it was necessary to take a multitude of measures to prevent COVID-19 in the work environment, also measures to protect the physical and mental health of employees, [1].

Essentially this can be divided into two categories: external - how firms interact with customers, suppliers and other stakeholders; internal – how firms manage employees and employer-employee relationships, [2].

The COVID-19 pandemic has not only fundamentally changed the way many organizations operate, but also led to the failure of many businesses around the globe, [2]. The pandemic has been the determining factor for accelerating the existing global trend to embrace modern technologies leading to transformations in lifestyles, work patterns and business strategies, [3, 4, 5].

Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic represented a type of "trigger" for the increasing, the adoption and use digitalization in the organization of work and the office, along with opportunities, challenges and costs foreseen and unforeseen, leading to both feedback negative and positive, [6, 7, 8].

Characterized by its devastating impact on livelihoods and business performance, the COVID-19 pandemic also highlights the vast digital divide between rich and poor, between rural and urban areas, and between advanced and developing economies.

Changing the way of working from classic to work at home led to a series of advantages such as greater flexibility for employers and employees as well as the reduction of time and expenses, but also disadvantages such as distancing and lack of socialization, which led to states of stress or anxiety felt by employees, [2, 8].

The possibility of implementing the work at home system on a large scale is greater in the specific sectors of the ICT field and especially for people who are overqualified compared to the employees who are not qualified or who have to do production work. Obviously, there are many sectors of activity where working from home it is not possible.

II. ANALYSIS OF THE WORKING TYPE FROM EMPLOYEE'S PERSPECTIVE IN THE PANDEMIC CONTEXT

2.1 The questionnaire

To analyze the way of working in the pandemic context, it was developed a questionnaire made on Microsoft platform, and we used the Google Form package. The questionnaire contains 24 questions regarding to age, gender, type of work performed (work from office/work from home), field of activity, difficulties encountered, advantages/disadvantages, productivity, stress, preference regarding to the type of work performed now and in the future. The questionnaire was sent online, through social media platforms. People who filled out the form signed in with a valid email address. The login link was active in May 2022. The period to which respondents reported was from March 2020 to May 2022.

2.2 Data about respondents

At the questionnaire answered 94 people out of 100 who were sent the login adress. From the total of those who answered, 48 are female and 46 are male, so it was a percentage of 51.1% female and 48.9% male. We divided the respondents into five age categories, and in Fig. 1 is a graphic representation of the surveyed group is given. It is important to mention that none of the group of respondents worked from home before the start of the COVID 19 pandemic in March 2020. Between March 2020 and April 2022, 89% of the respondents experienced the work from home mode and 11% of them worked only in the physical system during this period, a graphical representation is shown in Fig. 2.

2.3 Work fields of the respondents

From the point of view of the activity fields, the respondents are divided into several categories, these being: engineering, IT, call-center, marketing, banking, audit, automotive, accounting, R&D, education, graphic design and quality. Out of the total number of respondents, 71% work in IT industry, followed by marketing with 8%, and in Fig. 3, it is shown the total distribution of work fields of respondents. In order to have an image of the working environment, we also analyzed the type of company where the respondents work according to the company's capital. From their answers, it was found that a percentage of 86% work at a multinational company, 9% of the respondents work at a company with Romanian capital and 5% work in the public sector domain. In Fig. 4 is presented the correlation between the work fields of the respondents and the type of work that was approached during the pandemic. Analyzing this representation, an exponential growth of work from home we can observed, especially in IT companies.

2.4 The advantages and disadvantages of work from work

From the responses of the persons regarding the adaptation of the work from home, 88% of the respondents said that they adapted and 12% said that they did not adapted to this type of work; also, we did not notice notable differences in according to the age categories of the respondents.

The people who answered that they were comfortable with this type of work also listed a number of advantages which justifies their answer. Among the advantages listed by the respondents are: control over own schedule; flexibility; working from home offers the possibility of working from anywhere; eliminating the time spent in traffic; better concentration, work time is more efficient; the freedom not to be tied to an office, possibility to be casually dressed, the use of breaks to solve personal problems, saving money by reducing transport and the meals expenses and so on.

Analyzing the way that the respondents accommodate to the work from home, the majority of those respondents consider that saving time, saving money and flexibility are the main advantages of this type of working. In Fig. 5, we can see the advantages of working from home, thus 45% of the respondents chose as the first answer time economy, another 42% time flexibility of work and 13% saving money.

Analyzing the respondents answers regarding to the disadvantages of work from home, this were divided into several categories like: the disorganization of working time, the increase of expenses with home utilities, sedentarism, social distancing, the lack of a typical place for work in their own home, the extension working time. All of these are represented graphically in Fig. 6.

2.5 The productivity of work from home

Related to the productivity level of the respondents, a percentage of 65% of the survey participants stated that the work from home maximized their productivity level, 22% answered that they did not notice an increase in productivity, and 13% of these respondents preferred not to associate themselves with this categories.

Among the methods approached for maintaining concentration during the working day, the respondents mentioned that they resorted to the following: setting fixed times for breaks, playing music in the background; mobile phone on mute mode; coffee; chocolate; isolation from distract factors; outdoor movement; agenda with daily tasks; respecting the same time interval as on the office; setting mini deadlines; meditation; tasks solved one by one, elimination of disturbing factors (telephone, social networks, games); schedule 9-17; balance between on-line meetings and efective work time; task prioritization and so on.

The productivity of the respondents was affected by a series of difficulties such as noise, poor internet connection, energy drops, problems related to children and a category of insignifiant difficulties. In Fig. 7 is shown the types of difficulties during work from home. A more detailed analysis of the answers to this question revealed that women encounter more difficulties during work from home, in all age categories interviewed.

2.6 The respondents' daily routine

To the question if the daily routine has changed when changing the way of working from office to work from home, 85% of the respondents answered positively and 15% did not consider that there was a change. Fig. 8 shows a graph with the changes in the daily routine of the respondents.

The answers regarding compliance with the number of working hours revealed that 48% of the respondents respect it while 52% do not respect the predetermined number work hours.

By evaluating the answers regarding to the change in daily routines, we noticed that the impact was greater on the younger age categories, also in the case of women because it extends their job activities after the end of working hours. In Fig. 9 we can see the change of the working hours for the respondents according to the gender category.

During the lock-down period but also during the following period when employees experienced working from home, most respondents said that the main reasons that affected their productivity and daily routine were daily stress, fear of the unknown, isolation and anxiety. A percentage of 64% of the respondents answered that they frequently faced such episodes, 31% declared that they did not feel that their stress level increased, and 5% said that they did not know if stress level increased. Another issue that influenced the daily routine was the dedicated workspace in their own home. If 55% of the respondents say that they worked in a dedicated space, they followed the schedule and daily activities at the office; 45% of respondents did not have a dedicated space and most of them are those who continued working after the established schedule or did not made any differences between work and relaxation during the day.

2.7 Employees work preference after the pandemic period

Working from home is a hotly debated topic these days, so respondents were asked if they prefer work from home, hybrid work or work at office. The majority of respondents, 59%, answered that they would prefer to continue working in a hybrid system, 36% want to continue in a work from home system and only 5% of respondents want to return to classic office work.

Analyzing the evaluated age categories, it is observed that in all the interviewed categories there is a tendency to chose the hybrid or work from home, but surprisingly, this is desired especially by the category over 30 years old. Also they answered that they don't want to go to classic office work. Respondents from the 21-30 age categories want to work in a hybrid system in the future. The over 41 categories said that a hybrid and the work from home systems are the most suitable for their work both now and in the future.

The predominant choice of a hybrid work system is probably due to the accumulation of stress and social distancing during the working period from home. Fig. 11 shows a graphic representation of the preference of the type of work after the end of pandemic according to the analyzed age categories

III. CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic had a major impact on businesses and their employees.

Social distancing requirements, changing labor market patterns and continued uncertainty have brought new working practices, processes, products and services, many of them will probably remain.

The adoption of new digital technologies has been central to these changes. Teleworking means changing the central location of work away from the regular office workspace.

Work from home is preferred because it is more flexible, no time is wasted in traffic, possibility to work from anywhere, as long as the person don't leave the country which is part of, less distracted than working from office(more quietly).

However, in addition to work from home, more people prefer hybrid work. The study shows us this aspect, because they want diversification, days to socialize with colleagues, have work-related conversations, coffee breaks, but also days when they should be maximally focused on tasks and not be distracted by anyone.

The results obtained with the help of the questionnaire demonstrate that society is open to any change and that regardless of the situation, people adapt immediately and find solutions to the problems that arise.

Figures

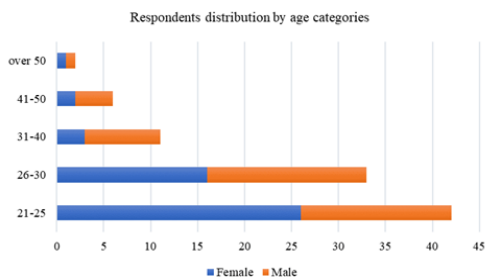


FIGURE 1 Respondents distribution by age categories

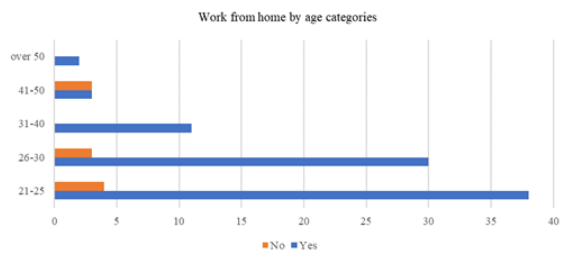


FIGURE 2 Work from home by age categories.

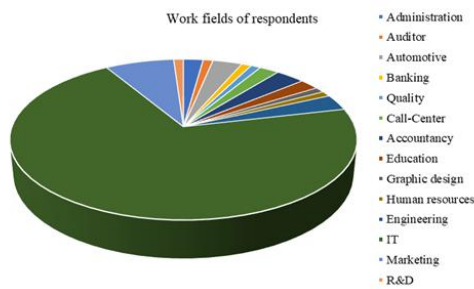


FIGURE 3 Work fields of the respondents

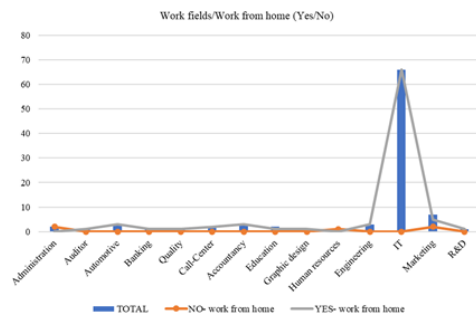


FIGURE 4 Work from home by work fields

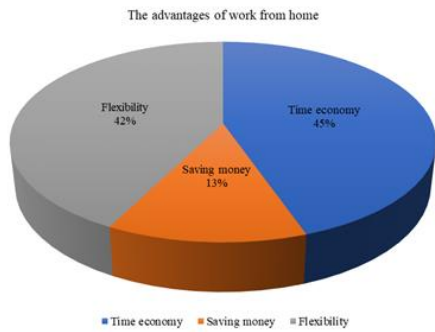


FIGURE 5 Categories of advantages for work from home

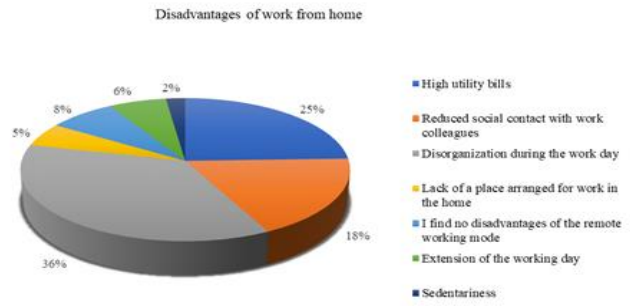


FIGURE 6 Categories of disadvantages for work from home

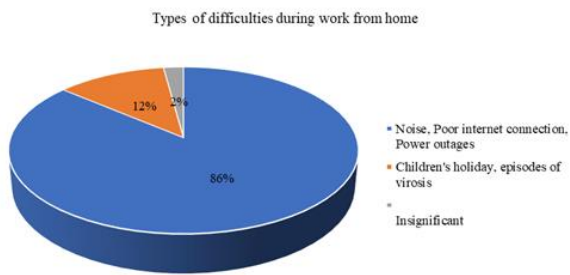


FIGURE 7 Types of difficulties during work from home

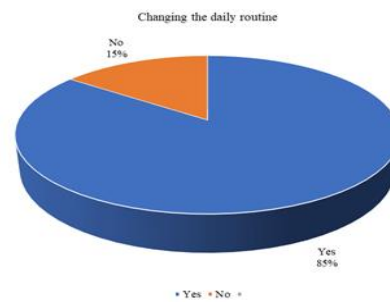


FIGURE 8 Changing the daily routine

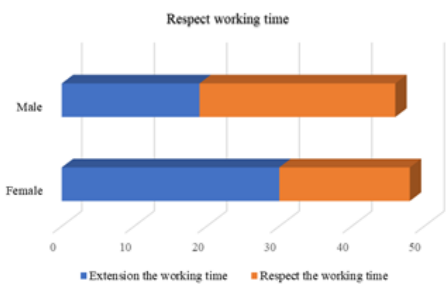


FIGURE 9 Working time compliance

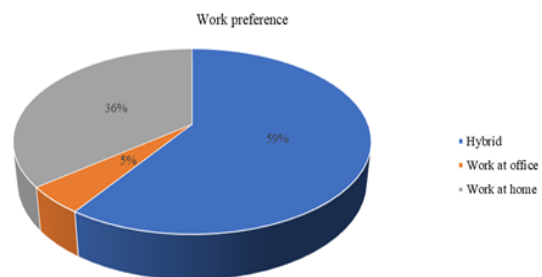


FIGURE 10 Work preference of employee in present and future

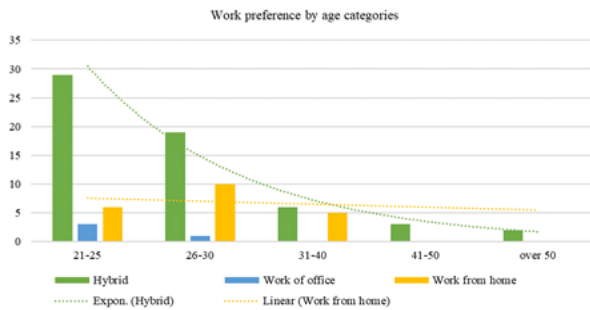


FIGURE 11 Work preference of employee in present and in future

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