



THE PANDEMIC FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE POLISH ASSOCIATION OF ORGANIZATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

COVID-19 has a significant impact on all aspects relating to work and organizational processes. The pandemic and the resultant crises caused changes in the functioning of companies and exerted influence on employees. On one hand, we are confronted with unemployment and collapses of companies, and, on the other, the situation has revealed that there is a number of opportunities created through the development of remote working, changes in management relations and coping with very difficult consequences.

At the 4th Convention of the Polish Association of Organizational Psychology (PSPO) in Warsaw held on-line on 21-22 May 2020, we - as work and organizational psychologists - were reflecting on a manner which could be employed to facilitate solutions globally. We defined specific areas that were most affected by the pandemic and the crisis and maintained that it is necessary to face potentially negative implications in addition to positive aspects when managing new situations.

Rise of uncertainty

The coronavirus pandemic triggered a dramatic rise of uncertainty among employees and employers. A considerable number of employees came face-to-face with substantial changes in work organization, or even the impossibility to perform their work. Lack of experience with a remote working model and with intensive application of communication technology has given rise to strong negative emotions and stress. Many organizations were confronted with a real threat of bankruptcy. Consequently, anxiety over the very existence and continuation of careers arose in thousands of employees and managers. All the organizational changes have been ongoing under significant time pressure. A number of employees and managers admitted that they take pride in rising up to this challenge. A sense of relief that the situation is returning to normal is also experienced by many people. However, a sense of uncertainty will remain in many companies and institutions for a longer time.

Necessity to work from home

The necessity to work from home forced large groups of employees from various lines of business to become familiarized with modern information technology solutions in a fast and effective manner. This escalated tensions at the outset, but also led to the acquiring of valuable competencies by employees, managers and entire companies. It would be advisable not to withdraw from, or abandon, new solutions and procedures but to continue to use them, particularly in areas where they proved effective.

Working from home for a lot of people entailed redefining their relations with family members. Families had to accept the fact that a work-at-home person is physically at home, but not available to them all the time. Conflicts brought about by such situations were a source of decreased well-being and resulted in negative mental health implications.

Employers' problems

Huge stress induced by numerous causes appeared among supervisors, managers and company owners. The main reason was a sense of uncertainty about the future observed on an unprecedented scale and related to the necessity to rebrand or even a company's breakdown. The industry sectors most severely affected included those in tourism, catering and services. It is notable that there is a lower demand for certain competencies while other skills and specific professions have increased in importance. A separate issue is a technological change and its considerable acceleration. Many employers have had little to no experience with remote working. Additionally, some employers were accustomed to using physical control over their employees and they could perceive their power in this way, but this was subjected to a complete change day by day. However, the changes introduced in the field of technological applications may constitute a big asset for employers, such as electronic circulation of documents, reduced printing or travelling costs, etc.

Work organization problems

The issues connected with work overload or underload are observable and we see that there is a growing need for the enhancement of computer literacy among employees. Work organization poses a logistical challenge for managers who have to take account of such aspects as the lack of equipment, the necessity to exercise control without direct verification of the manner in which work is performed, and the lack of legal regulations regarding new work models.

Likewise, employees who began to engage in their duties by working from home were made to structure their work schedule by themselves – a task for which they were not always prepared. In view of the current situation, special assistance should be offered to all health professionals and they should be provided with help in solving work organization problems occurring during their struggles with the pandemic.

Problems viewed from an HR perspective

The dire consequences experienced as a result of the pandemic and economic crisis is underscores the importance of HR and its underestimation by employers, especially with those that have a tendency to downsize sections managing human resources. It is a short-sighted view since in the era of the crisis, it is HR specialists who will offer solutions to issues regarding human resources management in new circumstances. We, as work and organizational psychologists, have the knowledge to provide competent assistance in solving the aforementioned problems and will take action by relying on our factual knowledge and skills while making use of the latest research findings and good practices.