

Counterproductive Aspects of Remote Work in the Context of Exchange of Knowledge

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Abstract: The article is devoted to the problem of impact the remote work might have on exchange of knowledge in an organisation, with particular emphasis on the aspects of counterproductive work behaviour. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, remote work has become an everyday element of human resources management almost all over the world. However, not all the consequences of introducing remote work on a massive scale have a positive impact. Some of them imply significant problems in organising information exchange, at levels of creation, distribution and perception of knowledge. The cognitive goal of the article is to identify remote work factors that imply counter productivity at work. The purpose of the study is to develop methods to support pro-effective work behaviour in the context of knowledge exchange in remote work. The article analysis will be based on quantitative research conducted among people working remotely. The survey was conducted in December 2021 among generation Z. For this purpose, the author used an interview questionnaire. It was completed by respondents both in a traditional way and using an online survey. Until now, attention has been paid mainly to the positive aspects of remote work, which significantly improves knowledge management in organisations. The novelty of this research relates to paying attention to counterproductive implications of remote work as well as an attempt to develop methods to overcome these implications in the field of knowledge exchange in an organisation.

Keywords: Counterproductive Work Behaviour, Knowledge Management, Remote Work.

1. Introduction

The issue of counter productivity is important and can be burdensome. On the one hand, the market economy and the resulting competition on the labour market should eliminate such phenomena from the workplace, but on the other hand, counterproductive behaviour sometimes is on such a large scale that make the employers helpless. Nothing seems simpler than firing an employee who exhibits this type of behaviour. In practice, however, it is not that simple. The problems that arise in this area are closely related to management, e.g. is it more profitable to fire such workers, or can it better help them to change their behaviour to generate mutual benefit? This may particularly apply to highly qualified workers who have rare and important competences for the employer.

This problem is important due to several reasons. Firstly, it is important from the point of view of an organisation hiring employees exhibiting counterproductive behaviour. It happens that such behaviours are transferred from the environment of the organisation, e.g. from the culture of the local community. Secondly, this problem is also important from the employee's point of view, because counterproductive behaviours are often a form of adaptation to organisational pathologies and can cause moral conflicts, especially when they are forced by an employee group. "Counterproductive work behaviour can be seen in the context of the theory of organisational stress, according to which organisational tensions, interpersonal conflicts and perceived injustice are stressors, to whom counterproductive behaviour is an adaptive reaction." (Fox, Spector & Miles 2001, p. 291) It is worth emphasizing here the importance of the issue of the sense of justice in the organisation and its impact on productivity (Macko 2009). Some counterproductive behaviours can also be very burdensome outside the organisation, e.g. for the families of employees (using psychoactive substances or aggressive behaviours), which may adversely affect the work-life balance.

This issue can also be approached in terms of the human resources process. It is primarily related to hiring and dismissing workers. That is, how to recognize and assess the risk associated with counterproductive behaviours during recruitment and employee selection, and secondly, who, when and on what basis can be dismissed if these problems become dangerous for the organisation? But other aspects of the human resources process are also important, such as transferring employees, managing careers and competences, etc.

Another aspect relates to the culture of the organisation and the organisational stress occurring in it. These are cultural norms that tolerate and even support counterproductive behaviours (e.g. pathological informal groups focused on protecting their members, not on achieving the goal of the organisation, or taking psychoactive drugs) as actions that reduce organisational stress. The above circumstances justify the choice of a research

problem, especially because there are not many studies based on empirical research in Polish publications on this subject.

In this study, the emphasis will be placed on the impact of remote work on counterproductive behaviours.

2. Literature overview

The analysis of counterproductive behaviours carried out so far focused mainly on the phenomenon of organisational pathologies. However, it is worth paying attention to a more constructive approach, namely the concept of a "healthy organisation". Józef Penc defines this concept as follows: "it seems that a healthy organisation is a naturally efficient organisation in the pragmatic sense, but also capable of remedying all difficulties that stand or may stand in the way of its development and harmonious cooperation with the environment of its activity. It is therefore an organisation sensitive to innovation and change, capable of generating and implementing them, competing with the advantage of customer values, friendly to employees and the environment." (Penc 2001, p. 12) While the concept of organisational pathologies has become well established in publications on the subject, the concept of a healthy organisation is not found often. It is also used by Ryszard Stocki, who even writes about the "anatomy of a healthy organisation" (Stocki 2005). The increasingly more frequent medical analogies may attract attention. Penc's definition is interesting because it brings attention to the positive aspects of a "healthy organisation" (it is supposed to be able to adopt adaptive changes, among other things), and not only to the lack of pathology. Jerzy Terelak describes this issue in a similar way when he writes about the concept of a norm at an organisation. Nevertheless, earlier he mentions the following models of the norm: a quantitative model - those behaviours that constitute a statistical majority are considered normal; a socio-cultural model - those behaviours that are consistent with the cultural pattern of normality (normative model) are considered normal; a pragmatic model - also called a holistic model is defined as follows: "In the practice of managing human resources, synonyms of such a health standard, useful for an organisation are the concepts of well-being or quality of life, and in empirical research, due to methodological limitations, we encounter rather detailed approaches, separately analysing the biosphere (biology) in general biological categories and the cultural sphere (psychology) - in terms of personal or organisational potential." (Terelak 2012, p. 447) In the last model, the concept of well-being is the most important, which can be identified with the ability to develop - both in terms of people and the organisation.

However, it should be remembered that counterproductive behaviours, just like any pathology, are not senseless or irrational actions. They always play a function towards achieving a goal, but it is contrary to the goal of the organisation. The basic question in the diagnosis of such behaviours should be: what goals makes it possible to implement counterproductive behaviours and why are members of the organisation more interested in achieving competitive goals, triggering pathological behaviours, rather than the initial goals of the organisation?¹

One of the factors perpetuating counterproductive behaviours is the mechanism of denial. This defence mechanism known from psychology is also often found in organisational behaviours, and in this case serves to deny the costs resulting from counterproductive behaviours. In other words, "perhaps such behaviours are inappropriate, but after all, nothing serious is happening". This type of attitude usually leads to such intensity of organisational pathologies that counteracting them becomes extremely difficult. The denial mechanism is one of the most typical self-destructive processes in the organisation. Some authors even use the term "Self-Defeating Organisation." (Hardy & Schwartz 1996, p. 142 – 143)

3. Remote work

When referring to Davenport and Prusak, it can be stated that "Knowledge is a fluid mix of framed experience, values, contextual information, and expert insight that provides a framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information. It originates and is applied in the minds of knowers. In organisations, it often becomes embedded not only in documents or repositories but also in organisational routines, processes, practices, and norms." (Davenport and Prusak 2000, p. 5). Standards, values or artifacts as elements of the

¹An interesting example is provided by "Hotel Pacific", a film from 1975 directed by Janusz Majewski based on the novel by Henryk Worcel with the same title. A young waiter in an internship found a large amount of money on a table while cleaning. He wanted to give it to his supervisor, but his colleague instructed him that if he did, he would make himself suspect that he was stealing elsewhere, since he was demonstrating such honesty. There were double standards in this organisation. Fair conduct would be against the tacitly accepted value system, according to which acting to the detriment of the employer is the most normal course of action.

organisational culture may include knowledge of the organisation, among others, about the ways of achieving goals or responding to crisis situations. This also applies to the type of organisational culture, e.g. a culture based on individualism or collectivism, based on competition or cooperation that conveys knowledge about ways of achieving goals in various ways. A change in this type of knowledge is significantly more difficult than knowledge of a technological type, because Information Technologies relate to the sphere of mechanisms regulating human behaviour in companies, and at the same time remain outside the sphere of consciousness. There is one feature of knowledge that is worth emphasizing: people have knowledge and develop it. Similarly to information that comes from data, knowledge comes from information. Information can be transformed into knowledge through the following actions: - Comparison: how does information about this situation relate to other situations we know about? - Consequences: how important is information for decisions and actions? – Connections: does this knowledge refer to the already possessed knowledge? - Conversation: what do others think about this information? (Davenport and Prusak 2000, p. 6) The data comes from appropriate databases, records, archives, etc. The information is obtained through messages but knowledge is generated in the minds of people, among people who are professionals in certain areas. Knowledge can also originate in contacts between people, conversations and learning. Hence, the exchange of knowledge is an important tool for creating and developing knowledge.

4. Knowledge sharing

Why is knowledge sharing so important? “Another aspect associated with creating knowledge is the exchange of this knowledge. There is no new knowledge without contact being made between different research centres, which interact and inspire one another. This is the reason why most innovations came into being in places where communication amongst those centres had been facilitated. Usually communication was stimulated by economic contacts and wars that helped technological innovations and cultural patterns to intermingle in different regions. Stagnation and regress was perceived in all places which were short of knowledge exchange.” (Cichobłaziński 2021, p. 199). The best example are Tasmanian Aborigines who gradually began to forget well known inventions and Technologies, i.e. striking fire, swing clothes or fishery when their Island disconnected from Australian continent (Brockman 2003).

The importance of knowledge sharing can be considered both at the macro and micro level, i.e. at the enterprise level. “Knowledge sharing behaviour can be called an engine of exchange and creating knowledge processes. (...) Knowledge sharing behaviour is a first step to knowledge transfer, which is a one way action, yet the final and most desirable phase is knowledge exchange as it reflects to knowledge seeking action.” (Albrychiewicz-Słocińska 2015, p. 70)

In this context, the relationship between remote work and knowledge exchange is becoming an important issue. It is about the extent to which remote work helps and hinders the sharing of knowledge in the organisation. Remote work has become very common during the COVID-19 epidemic to an unprecedented degree and everything indicates that its application will increase. For this reason, this problem seems to be important and unrecognised.

The phenomenon of knowledge sharing has recently been highly explored. It is important due to the widely used digital technologies (Kukowska & Skolik 2021). Nevertheless, in this study, the focus will be placed on the analysis of the phenomenon at the micro level, i.e. the enterprise. It is at this level that knowledge sharing is most exposed to all kinds of distortions caused by the replacement of face to face employee relations by remote relations (Nemțeanu, Dabija & Stanca 2021). Remote work also has an impact on the process of sharing knowledge in the aspect of organisational hierarchy and power distribution in organisations (Skolik & Karczewska 2021).

Another key factor of work productivity in knowledge management is remote work. “Telecommuting is becoming a common work option for knowledge workers with benefits for both employers and employees. In an information age, where information itself is key to performing work tasks, understanding how telecommuting knowledge workers find, use, and depend on information is key to good management.” (McInerney 1999, p.69)

5. Methodology

The research results presented in the study constitute a part of a quantitative survey conducted among young people at the turn of 2021. The research problem of the project related to the impact of the remote learning

experiences on the preferences in the area of remote work among young people in reference to: employee relations, knowledge, development and learning, motivation, communication, teamwork, creativity, work organisation, work-life balance and counterproductive behaviours.

The study presents a fragment of the research results related to knowledge exchange. The following research assumptions were adopted in the area of analysis of the influence of preferences in the field of remote work on the perception of knowledge exchange processes in the organisation:

- the COVID-19 pandemic situation resulted in a mass transition of young people to the remote learning and remote work mode, which contributed to the popularisation of remote work;
- the advantages and disadvantages of working remotely, also in the area of knowledge exchange, are described in literature on the subject;
- the motives of the knowledge exchange transaction were analysed in accordance with the typology of Devenport and Prusak and include: trust, reciprocity, reputation and altruism.

As part of the research, the following problem was posed: Has the experience of remote learning contributed to the creation of an erroneous perception (in relation to the features of remote work described in literature) of remote work and its impact on the exchange of knowledge?

The survey was conducted using quantitative research methods using the survey technique. The technique was chosen because of the possibility of a direct contact with the respondent. The study covered young people studying various areas and majors, coming from the Silesia Voivodeship, because in relation to this group of youth, due to their professional competences, it is possible to use remote or hybrid work in the future.

The research tool used was a standardised questionnaire consisting of closed questions and statements. A Likert scale (the so-called Likert scaling technique) was used for the responses, which makes it possible to determine the relative intensity of the different responses (Babbie, 2004, p. 192). The form of established and specified conditions allows for a reliable and quick analysis of the collected material, their uniformity and ease of development (Churchill 2009). The research tool (questionnaire) was prepared by the author and was formulated by the members of the research team - the employees of the Department of Applied Sociology and Human Resource Management, Faculty of Management, Częstochowa University of Technology.

STATISTICA software was used in the process of compiling the research results. In order to assess the significance of the differences in the analysed variables, the non-parametric ANOVA Kruskal-Wallis (AKW) test was used. For the purposes of analysing the results of the study, a number of statistical hypotheses was adopted relating to the occurrence of significant differences in the respondents' statements due to their characteristics and experience in the area of work, remote learning and remote work. It was assumed that H0 is a hypothesis stating that there are no differences due to the grouping variable, while H1 is an alternative hypothesis stating that there are such differences. These hypotheses were verified by means of the aforementioned statistical test which allowed for the rejection of the null hypothesis about the lack of significant differences and the adoption of an alternative hypothesis about the existence of significance of differences. The study presents the relationships verified with statistical tests, which authorise the conclusion about the regularities in the studied group.

In the research were formulated two general hypotheses:

1. Remote work has positive influence on knowledge sharing in an organization.
2. Remote work does not influence counterproductive behaviours in organization.

6. Findings

226 students participated in the study. In the light of the literature, the representatives of generation Z are most often described as people born after 1995, although researchers include those born in 1990 as their representatives, and in other approaches only those born in 2000 and later. In line with the above criteria, the distribution of respondents in the studied group is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: The distribution of the studied group according to the definition categories of generation Z.

	Born in 1990 and later %	Born in 1995 and later %	Born in 2000 and later %
Generation Z	89.82	83.19	29.20

Others	10.18	16.81	70.80
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Authors' own compilation

Since the most common division into generations in the literature indicates 1995 or 1990 as the year from which one may talk about generation Z, in the analysis of the results of the research it was assumed that the dominant population in the study group was gen Z. Due to the fact that statistical tests did not reveal statistically significant differences (table 3) in the opinions of representatives of gen Z and other respondents regarding the analysed issues, the description and analysis of the research results will present the overall results without distinguishing between generation Z and the older generation Y respondents.

50.44% women and 48.23% men participated in the study. Among the respondents, 86.72% indicated having experience in the area of remote learning, and 12.83% did not have such experience (one person did not express their opinion in this area). With regard to professional experience, the majority of the respondents - 86.28% confirmed such experience, and 13.27% denied having it (one person did not make any indications). Among the respondents, 48.67% of them had experience in the area of remote work, 50.88% did not experience this form of work (one person did not express their opinion in this area). When asked about their preferences regarding the form of work in the future, the respondents most often chose a hybrid form of work - 50.00%, followed by stationary work 35.40%, remote work was indicated as preferred by only 12.39% of respondents (2.21% did not express their opinion in this area).

7. Analysis of the frequency

At this stage, the distribution of answers to questions relevant to the research problem posed, i.e. the issue of counterproductivity in learning and remote work, will be analysed.

Respondents pointed out that both in professional work and learning, remote contacts make non-professional contacts more difficult between employees. 68.3% responded 'I agree' and 'I strongly agree'.

On the other hand, remote work and remote learning will hinder the emergence of conflict situations in work teams. 39.2% of respondents provided such answers. This trend is not as clear as in the previous variable, but it allows to draw the conclusion that at least remote work does not favour the emergence of conflicts.

This conclusion could seem trivial if it were not for the distribution of answers to the next question regarding the impact of remote work on the difficulties in understanding the transmitted commands and tasks. In this case, 46.4% of respondents indicated such difficulties. Nevertheless, remote work does not contribute to the emergence of conflicts.

A clear tendency can be observed in the case of answers to the question about the occurrence of various types of distractions (barking dog, children, noise on the train...) during remote work and remote learning. 71.6% of the respondents agreed with such thesis. Thus, both remote work and remote learning require a much higher level of concentration than their stationary counterparts. This may impact counterproductivity.

Respondents also indicated an increasing sense of isolation caused by remote work. 62.3% of respondents indicated such a trend. The sense of isolation indicates an unmet need for belonging. This may have a direct impact on the phenomenon of knowledge sharing, which is very difficult in the absence of face-to-face contact and the feeling of loneliness caused by it.

53.5% of the respondents indicated that remote work makes mutual motivation of employees more difficult. Employees who are deprived of direct contact with each other do not have the opportunity to influence each other, especially when it comes to positive influence. Isolation, to which workers performing remote work are condemned, requires a significant level of self-motivation and self-organisation. This conclusion is concurrent with the answers obtained to the question relating to difficulties in contact between employees. 49.4% indicated such difficulties. Therefore, it is a significant problem from the point of view of the phenomenon of counterproductivity.

Difficulties in building emotional bonds in the work environment are a problem with an even stronger impact on the phenomenon of counterproductivity. 60.2% of respondents indicated the existence of such difficulties. As

one may know, a significant part of time is spent at work, and remote work significantly hinders the formation of emotional bonds.

Another problem resulting from remote work and affecting the productivity of employees is the adaptation of employees to new work. As many as 58.8% of respondents indicated that remote work makes it much more difficult to adapt, which may directly affect the phenomenon of counterproductivity.

A significant group of respondents also indicated disturbances in the rhythm of day and night in remote work. This problem was indicated by 44.1% of respondents. Such disorders can cause employees' productivity to decline with prolonged periods of remote work or remote learning. This is due to the fact that you do not have to leave your home for work and be back at a certain time. You can perform your duties properly at any time of the day or night.

Correlations: independent variable – having professional experience

Among the independent variables, the "having professional experience" variable was selected. This variable quite significantly differentiates the answers to questions related to dependent variables. Those relationships were selected, in which a statistically significant relationship measured with the Kruskal-Wallis test was demonstrated.

1. Respondents with professional experience mostly (61.5%) indicated that remote work does not contribute to maintaining work readiness. The results of the Kruskal-Wallis test ($p = 0.0511$), with the assumed level of significance ($\alpha = 0.05$), indicate the lack of grounds for rejecting the verified null hypothesis. This means a noticeable decrease in the level of motivation in the case of remote work.
2. People with professional experience (60.0%) more often indicated the occurrence of various types of distractors (barking dog, children at home, etc.) than respondents without such experience. The results of the Kruskal-Wallis test ($p = 0.0448$), with the assumed level of significance ($\alpha = 0.05$), indicate rejection of the verified null hypothesis. This can be understood as
3. The respondents having remote work experience (66.7%) also indicated difficulties in cooperating with colleagues at work. The results of the Kruskal-Wallis test ($p = 0.0127$), with the assumed level of significance ($\alpha = 0.05$), indicate rejection of the verified null hypothesis. Contacts with colleagues are an important element of teamwork. Respondents with no experience in remote work underestimated this type of difficulties.
4. The distribution of answers in the case of the question about the negative impact of remote work on the effectiveness of the employee team is as follows. In this case, people without professional experience in remote work (70.0%) claimed that remote work does not adversely affect the efficiency of the work team. The results of the Kruskal-Wallis test ($p = 0.0195$), with the assumed level of significance ($\alpha = 0.05$), indicate rejection of the verified null hypothesis.
5. This makes it difficult to understand commands/tasks. The results of the Kruskal-Wallis test ($p = 0.0005$), with the assumed level of significance ($\alpha = 0.05$), indicate rejection of the verified null hypothesis. Employees who prefer stationary work more often point to the fact that in remote work it is more difficult to explain the tasks and commands provided. In stationary work, however, it is much easier to do it on an ongoing basis. When working remotely, such explanations require the exchange of additional information using electronic means of communication.

The presented research results indicate numerous regularities regarding the phenomenon of counterproductivity in remote work. Nevertheless, remote work has many advantages, the most important being: reducing costs, the possibility of cooperation regardless of the place of residence. Nevertheless, research has evidenced several factors that also have a negative impact of this form of work organisation on its effectiveness. This impact is particularly relevant to the phenomenon of counterproductivity, which is a serious problem in any organisation.

8. Discussion and conclusions

When analysing the obtained data, the following should be stated:

1. Remote work makes non-professional contacts between employees more difficult, thus preventing the creation of informal bonds. Such bonds (if they do not take pathological forms) play a very positive role

in the life of the organisation. They particularly affect the shaping of a positive organisational climate. Remote work promotes the creation of a sense of loneliness and isolation.

2. When working remotely, it is more difficult to focus on a given task. Employees are subject to many distracting and deconcentrating factors. When work is done at one's home, the employee is exposed to many stimuli, the source of which is family life. This type of disturbance does not occur when you perform your duties in the workplace.
3. On the other hand, remote work has a smaller impact on the emergence of conflict situations compared to stationary work. This is understandable as employees rarely interact with one another directly. However, it should be remembered that when responding to these answers, the respondents most likely meant conflicts initiated directly during the interaction. It should be assumed that deeper conflicts resulting from conflicting interests or bad communication can only be postponed. This conclusion is consistent with the results presented by the team composed of: Becker W.J., Belkin L.Y., Tuskey S.E., Conroy S.A. (2022).
4. Remote work also makes mutual motivation of employees more difficult. There are no positive stimuli that are only transmitted during face-to-face interactions. Employees do not inspire each other, do not share tacit knowledge, and do not have a mobilizing influence when implementing tasks. Managing a team while working remotely is much more difficult but not entirely impossible.
5. When working remotely, the processes of building emotional bonds between employees are also hindered. Emotional bonds play a large role in the creation of employee relationships, which cannot be reduced only to functional relationships. This aspect of employee relations has already been highlighted by the creator of the Human Relation concept – Elton Mayo (Muldoon 2020).
6. Remote work also hinders the adaptation process. It takes much longer for the employees to adapt to the culture of a new organisation and achieve the stage of full productivity later. Such a situation may result from a lack of the appropriate information flow regarding an employee's productivity. In remote work, feedback is significantly hindered and impoverished.
7. In remote work, the day rhythm is also disturbed. The distinction between day and night is disturbed. Most tasks can be performed at any time. Employees do not go to work and often, they do not have regular working hours. This negatively affects the physiological rhythm of human functioning, thus hindering effective rest.
8. In remote work, the level of readiness for work also decreases. Employees may be ready to work at any time, which means they are almost never fully ready. This results in work in a state of incomplete mobilization, which is also associated with the achievement of unsatisfactory results.

9. Implications from theoretical and practical aspects of the study

1. Employee who are going to work in remote mode should be trained in order to avoid problems indicated above.
2. For this purpose special coaching programme should be prepared.
3. Remote work is very different from stationary work, and for this reason there is a need not only for special coaching, but also for detailed research taking into account the risk of counterproductive behavior.

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