# The pandemic and remote working as challenges to labour pedagogy

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**Abstract.** The article addresses an important and current issue regarding changes in the labour market resulting from the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, which broke out at the beginning of 2020. Actions taken to protect the health and life of citizens have disrupted the current trends in the labour market. According to the Central Statistical Office, the pandemic negatively impacted the professional situation of young people, but not only theirs. Organizing work outside the company without direct contact and supervision has become an enormous challenge. Labour pedagogy as a pedagogical subdiscipline may develop new operation models for specialists dealing with work processes and human resource management, especially in their subjective dimension. The article is an attempt to describe the new market reality. The report outlines selected phenomena exposed by the pandemic, the resulting difficulties, and opportunities forcing all market participants to change their ways of acting, but above all, their thinking.

## Pandemia i praca w trybie *home office* wyzwaniem dla pedagogiki pracy

**Słowa kluczowe:** pandemia, praca *home office*, praca online, pedagogika pracy, higiena cyberpracy, zoomizm

**Streszczenie.** W artykule poruszono ważną i aktualną kwestię dotyczącą zmian na rynku pracy będących skutkiem pandemii SARS-CoV-2, która wybuchła z początkiem 2020 roku. Działania podjęte w celu ochrony zdrowia i życia obywateli poskutkowały zaburzeniem dotychczasowych trendów na rynku pracy. Pandemia według GUS wpłynęła szczególnie negatywnie na sytuację zawodową

ludzi młodych, ale nie tylko. Organizacja pracy poza firmą, bez bezpośredniego kontaktu i nadzoru, stała się ogromnym wyzwaniem. Pedagogika pracy jako subdyscyplina pedagogiczna może wypracować nowe modele działania dla specjalistów zajmujących się procesami pracy i zarządzaniem zasobami ludzkimi, zwłaszcza ich podmiotowym wymiarem. Artykuł stanowi próbę opisania nowej rzeczywistości rynkowej. W artykule zarysowane zostały wybrane zjawiska, które obnażyła pandemia, wynikające z nich trudności i możliwości zmuszając wszystkich uczestników rynku do zmiany sposobów działania, ale przede wszystkim myślenia.

## Introduction

Remote working, although known and announced for many years, was implemented all of a sudden and at a great scale, thus becoming an organisational challenge for the workforce and employers alike. The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic undoubtedly changed the style of work in all the sectors of the economy. Prior to the pandemic outbreak, working from home used to be a privilege for only 4% of the world's workforce, which mainly consisted of IT engineers, according to data (Dominik, 2020). The remote work system presented many new opportunities but also barriers for many groups of workers (e.g. women and persons with disabilities); it also streamlined and accelerated many processes. At the same time, however, it exposed deficiencies, shortcomings as well as situations which could be classified as dysfunctional or pathological. The circumstances which differed so much from the standard workplace pointed to the familiar and unfamiliar areas which had to be dealt with immediately. The pandemic and shift into remote working showed the need for nurturing e.g. extremely important interpersonal relations between workers and the implications of isolation. Moreover, the new situation revealed the need for reformulation of supervision and control systems, especially tools for monitoring homeworking and employees' computers, which pointed to an essential lack of trust in the workers' involvement, with the statement "if you are not present at the computer, you are not working" becoming the epitome of this attitude. Remote working requires excellent organisation and self-discipline, so one can clearly assume that not every single employee will work effectively and will feel at ease with this system. There are numerous areas requiring the involvement of work pedagogy in the context of working from home, like e.g. cultivating employees' work-life balance as well as recognizing the fact that remote working does not mean working 24/7. It is also important to look closely at the phenomenon of "zoomism", a culture of work or management styles applicable to hybrid teams. The literature and

labour market specialists are indicating a new division of the workforce, which became apparent at the moment of the introduction of homeworking. The new divide can be seen between those who work from home, a so-called "indoor class" and the "outdoor class" grouping those whose jobs cannot by any means be done remotely. Assembly line workers, drivers, nurses, construction workers or hairdressers can by no means count on the remote model of professional activity. Therefore, the entirely unprecedented global situation of the pandemic revealed new fields of activity for the pedagogy of work and for work pedagogues.

## (Post)pandemic labour market

The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic took both employers and employees by surprise and deranged the existing order and setup of the market forces. March 2020 made history as the period of breakthrough, crisis, anxiety and the unknown. The world stopped, the economy slowed down and humans had to lock themselves up at home for the sake of their own safety (Barańska, 2021). The pandemic precipitated the inevitable. A decade-long leap forward was made, especially in education – in particular with regard to tools and applications for remote classrooms. The coronavirus became the catalyst of technological change. For many years, there has been ample material in the subject literature on changes brought about by technological progress. The third and fourth industrial revolutions have been harbingers of transformations affecting the labour market and consequently, all members of society. As a result of production automatization brought about by the development of information and communication technologies, the barrier between humans and machines has begun to disappear. The change resulting from the aforementioned progress has been disturbing as already happening – according to R. Tomaszewska (2021), who depicts a posthuman, the ultimate cyborg as the descendant or successor of mankind in the future world of work.

The pandemic showed that companies were able to learn. The need for companies and employers to adapt to changes was described by P. Drucker, who defined and characterised *the knowledge organisation*, and by P. Senge, who mentioned *a learning organisation*. The demands presented by today's world should also be met by *intelligent*, *virtual* or *global organisations* alike (Borkowska, 2004). The ability to adapt to external circumstances, ICT infrastructure and hardware facilities turned out to be essential. One might presume that smaller companies find the adaptation process easier to implement. However, although

decision-making is faster and the company structure is flat, which allows managers to act promptly, the cost pertaining to work reorganisation is high. On the other hand, even though corporations have the financial means to carry out changes, the number of employees enforce the time-consuming introduction of particular procedures. Economies all over the world were faced with challenges brought about by the pandemic and the consequent lockdowns. Global labour markets outdid each other with the solutions which were introduced. It was necessary to preserve the continuity of business operations and work organization while ensuring the safety of employees. This was an unprecedented situation. Many companies were forced to lay off some staff or introduce shift work.

The consequences of the pandemic as a critical phenomenon can be considered with regard to positive and negative effects. Undoubtedly, the first lockdown was the hardest. It was a totally new situation. The ban on providing certain services deprived a part of society of the ability to make a living. The SME sector, in which the self-employed and family businesses account for 85%, had to suspend their operations overnight. Beauty, food and beverage, transportation, and travel services were most affected by the lockdown. All industries and sectors of the economy where direct face-to-face contact was involved were temporarily suspended or closed for an indefinite period of time. The first half of 2020 was fraught with redundancies, salary cuts or workers taking overdue vacations. The proposed exemptions, protective shields, or compensations did not pay the entrepreneurs' liabilities. The crisis also affected IT services providers as some of the companies resigned or put some projects on hold indefinitely. The IT sector was also reorganised as the demand for system architects, programmers, implementers and software testers increased when the lockdown was announced. It is thanks to them that the continuity of the work process in companies was preserved in the new formula – online mode.

The crisis caused by the pandemic may become a crucial element driving the changes, or the solutions introduced, which should remain with us for a longer time or even forever. Iwona Dominik points out what lessons should be learnt from the pandemic (Dominik, 2020). She asserts that the greatest challenge is the change of mentality with regard to the organisation of work. The hitherto traditional way of office functioning will move into virtual space. Online work in administration is here to stay for good thus meeting the flexitime condition. The 50/50 (stationary/online) monthly working time mode may become negotiable or even the bargaining chip in recruitment processes. The consequences of the pandemic are multifaceted; one of the aspects being

the so-called economy of isolation. This phenomenon is opposite to the so far promoted *sharing economy,* which is a partly environmental trend, focused mostly on moving away from owning goods and replacing that with the enjoyment of sharing them, thereby reducing expenses and costs.

The idea behind the sharing economy was to strengthen social ties, meet new people, learn new skills, and be flexible, comfortable and environment-friendly. Underlying the *Isolation economy* (Mehta, 2020), is the belief that we are entering a new (post-pandemic) normalcy but also the fear of being a threat to each other. The pandemic has separated people from each other with masks, plexiglass panels or safe distances painted on the floor. An example of the economy of isolation is the conversion of hotel rooms into individual offices and workspaces for employees unable to work from home, the hotel being a place without common spaces, corridors, social rooms or conference rooms. The pandemic also showed the direction of financial investment. According to forecasts, investors should focus on projects that will significantly change or protect our lives (vaccines, medicines, natural disaster prediction models) rather than projects focused on pure profit. The world's giants and tycoons indicate that huge sums of money have been invested in activities and projects, mostly start-ups, which have brought nothing of value to the world and humanity. The lockdown exposed the education system. It showed the shortcomings and digital-competence gaps of all participants in the teaching process. However, it can be firmly stated that it also showed how important, necessary, irreplaceable and underestimated the figure of the teacher is. I. Dominik writes: *The pandemic in the face of the challenges of remote teaching has shown how many problems related to education have been swept under the rug. Teachers' salaries are barely a fraction of these* (Dominik, 2020, p.12 ). The pandemic period has shown how much time children and young people spend at school, in extra-curricular activities, and in day-care centres, and what great support it is for parents, who have the opportunity to deal with all indispensable matters while their child is well taken care of. As the author points out, the school provides invaluable assistance in terms of care, socialization processes, meals and homework help. At this point, it is worth mentioning the phenomenon of digital exclusion, which consists not only of lack of access to the Internet, its quality, speed and stability of the connection, which are closely related to the urbanization of the area, but also the availability of equipment, software, its quality and the ability to use it. A DESI report published in 2021 ranks Poles' digital competence as 24th out of 27 countries (DESI, 2021). According to a report by the Digital Center

(2020), 85% of teachers surveyed had no experience with remote education prior to the coronavirus outbreak, and, equally important, in the context of the topic at hand, about 50-70 thousand children have no computer or tablet, and 10% of households have just one computer or tablet. This means that in the case of enforced isolation, a 2+2 family faced a very difficult situation, and usually the children waited with their lessons until their parents finished work, as not everything can be done from a cell phone. Therefore, investment in the Internet infrastructure should be one of the priorities.

The SarS-CoV-2 pandemic turned out to be the time to appreciate scholars. It can be said after Florian Znaniecki that society has appreciated the social role of scientists and realised that ignoring science is dangerous. Prior to the pandemic, reports, studies, warnings, and recommendations formulated by scientists and researchers from all over the world, addressed to politicians and decision-makers were treated in a fragmentary and marginal way. They were perceived as science fiction, a contribution to spreading unnecessary panic. Worldwide well-being resulted in a decline in vaccination rates, undermining of scientific authorities and a decline in trust in representatives of the scientific world "because online information is different". This trend has reversed. The international scientific community has become integrated, especially medical and peri-medical research teams, whose main goal became the development of a vaccine and a cure for the SARS-CoV-2 virus. In an era of ubiquitous information mush and bubbles, reliable, scientific, proven knowledge is once again growing in strength and regaining its due recognition. The post-pandemic world will use scientific and technological achievements to improve its daily functioning. To give an example, the fact that the virus can be transmitted by touching various surfaces has led to the conclusion that touching them should be reduced to a minimum. Thus the omnipresence of revolving doors, doors that open automatically with motion sensors or face readers, and processes of sanitizing and disinfecting common spaces done by robots. Martin Ford (2016), a Silicon Valley futurologist and author of the book *Dawn of the Robots. Will Artificial Intelligence Deprive Us of Jobs?* writes that robotization and automation trends have been progressing since 2000. The pandemic has created even more fertile ground for them. Many jobs created in the 1990s, as Ford notes, have begun to disappear due to the development of technology, outsourcing of IT departments or the growth of cloud services. The author describes the phenomenon of market polarization, which is characterised by division resulting in the opposite extremes being highly qualified workers with above-average skills and those lower-paid workers

who are very easily replaceable. In contrast, occupational groups which do not belong to either extreme, the so-called „middle class" including sales, administration, office work, production, operators and labourers, will find themselves in the most difficult situation in the labour market. We experience these changes on a daily basis when shopping (using self-service checkouts), making money transfers (using apps), ordering food or buying tickets at ticket machines. An interesting phenomenon from the point of view of the analysed topic is the exposure of certain myths which served and profited certain groups. Let us take Apple for instance, which after many years of standing on the position that specially dedicated agents are necessary for servicing (in this case, cleaning the screen) so that the coating is not damaged, admitted that ordinary disinfectants can also be used for this purpose.

## Online work, remote work, home office and legal and ethical issues

The terminology referring to online work varies widely. In the literature, we can find the terms "remote work", "online work", "telecommuting", or "working from home". Since the lockdown caused by the coronavirus pandemic, the term "remote work" has entered common usage. The pandemic exposed the shortcomings and inadequacies not only of labour regulations but also laws related to them and made it necessary to adapt them to the changes taking place. The legislation has adjusted certain provisions, but the unprecedented nature of the situation has generated problems hitherto unheard of, such as definitional arrangements related to what constitutes an accident at work and how the employer should participate in the costs incurred by the employee.

Remote work is a new type of work – introduced in Article 3 of the Law of March 2, 2020. (the so-called Act on COVID-19 Prevention). It is a different type of work than telework already present in the Polish system (Article 675 et seq. of the Labour Code) (Staniewicz, 2020). According to the regulations, the only element which has changed is the place of permanent performing of professional duties, which is usually the employee's home. The work should be completed just as in the case of pre-lockdown work. The changes resulting from the pandemic are recognised both by employers and employees. Many companies want to introduce a hybrid work model on a permanent basis or at the employee's request. There is a need for consultations on the rules and regulations for the aforementioned online work, which should be included in the Labour Code and replace

the existing regulations. Discussions on Internet forums show how sensitive this topic is. Internet users discuss problems in domestic companies regarding such issues as larger bills, the need to adjust the Internet connections, verification of employee attendance and efficiency, sick leaves or overtime.

Problematic issues described by employees relate to purchases of hardware and software for work, GDPR procedures (a private computer sometimes becomes business equipment, and the data on it should be under special protection), or granting helpdesk employees access to private computers. Remote work also increases the risk of hacking company systems and data theft. In forums and chat groups, support groups, we can also read about health deterioration due to prolonged sedentary work, lack of physical exercise, eyesight deterioration often caused by prolonged exposure to blue light emitted by monitors and phones, or back problems (due to lack of ergonomic chairs at home). We can also learn from chatrooms what practices were used by supervisors. An employee on sick leave during a pandemic once heard "(…) after all, you're not too sick to be unable to send an email." – this is undoubtedly an example of dysfunctional phenomena occurring in workplaces.

The new regulations should address fundamental areas of work, e.g. they should indicate what costs an employee incurs in connection with working from home (electricity, internet, equipment maintenance, depreciation of their own equipment) and provide an adequate financial equivalent. The legislator should indicate clearly on whom the obligation to provide or buy and insure equipment rests, redefine an accident at work or set the working hours. A natural consequence of the amendments to the Labour Code will be the revision of internal labour regulations. Attention should also be paid to the issue of intellectual property rights, sharing and publicizing materials and images as well as recording, archiving and processing them.

## An employee in the pandemic. Abandoned and supervised

The pandemic and lockdown have prompted the emergence of a new labour model, which Ariadna Estevez, a professor at the University of Sussex in the UK, calls *zoomism* (Estevez, 2020). The author points out that this model pulls workers out of their workplaces and locks them in their homes. It is a model that disciplines the middle class, supervising them through various procedures, processes and tools. Isolation and seclusion result in a weaker individual, who does not rebel and performs mandated activities without much resistance. Remote

work gives the apparent impression of greater freedom, while in practice it leads to increased formalization. This applies to the circulation of information, documents, and the assignment of tasks. Estevez stresses that this model of work optimizes the functioning of companies by shifting some costs of maintaining the organization to employees.

Marek Szymaniak (2020) assesses the situation in a similar way, asserting that the initial delight at the possibility of working from home gives way to various kinds of concerns. The stage of euphoria and satisfaction resulting from the possibility of getting up later, reducing commuting costs, and not having to put on makeup or buy clothes which comply with the company dress code slowly began to give way to stress, a sense of isolation, loneliness and an overload of responsibilities. A pandemic study on engagement while working remotely conducted by SWPS University, Carrotspot and Hays Poland (2020) found that 22% of respondents worked longer than the contractual 8 hours. Research conducted by ARC Market and Opinion and commissioned by Gumtree shows that as many as 68% of those working remotely admitted that they exceeded standard working hours. The reason for this, among others, was the difficulty in consulting topics with superiors or co-workers.

A report compiled by Buffer and AngelList (2020) states that 20% of employees working remotely face loneliness and problems with communication and collaboration. It is not only long-tenured employees familiar with the company who feel lonely, but also those newly hired. They may not have a problem finding someone's office, but the whole process of onboarding, and induction of a candidate into the company, is done remotely. The process of asking someone for help, or clarifying a doubt or a difficult situation is completely different because after each such action a trace is left in the online space, a note, text message or email. Colleague favour done in the virtual world looks different, it will no longer remain only between employees. Studies have shown that when working exclusively from home, we become less effective and creative over time. Remote work leads to the aforementioned greater formalization of information flow. Information is sent by email and through official, business channels, and there are no behind-the-scenes conversations over coffee in the social room, which turn out to be extremely important for the functioning of a team and are in a sense a "life-giving" phenomenon for the group. The opportunity to exchange opinions, discuss or even gossip during a cigarette break causes the team to integrate, inspire and motivate each other. Working remotely has severely limited this opportunity, with everyone working on their own and towards their

own goals. Connecting in advance on a video conference to gossip or grumble for 5 minutes cannot compensate for or replace real working relationships, because there is always someone listening, and watching, or the meeting is recorded so that nothing is missed. Communication, which is one of the cornerstones of the work process, does not happen in its own natural way. Eye contact is there, but since we do not look into the "eye" of the camera and at the screen instead to see everyone, the interlocutors feel like they are not being looked into their eyes. Conversation crashes or cuts off due to link instability, not everyone turns the camera on for various reasons so we speak to an avatar, a photo, an icon or even to an empty space because we are not sure if there is actually someone at the other end. A large number of participants in remote meetings also creates chaos. Employees are silent at first – because no one wants to start, next they all speak and shout at each other, after which they apologize and give each other the floor. They do not use the „raise your hand" functionality that most remote working tools have, so the employee who was the loudest or interrupted others gets to speak. In turn, employees who have not been allowed to speak, who have not been noticed, give up activity and lose motivation.

After the stage of initial satisfaction, employees begin to feel the negative effects of remote work and isolation. Human beings are social creatures, they need other people to function properly and effectively (with varying intensity), as their presence, touch, and verbal and non-verbal communication builds mental and physical balance. Meetings via webcam became cumbersome, and tiring, and caused stress, e.g. because of the evaluation of the appearance of the apartment. Psychologists (Lee, 2020) described this condition as *remote fatigue syndrome* (*Zoom fatigue syndrome*), manifested by headaches, eye pain, decreased concentration, a sense of alienation and intellectual haziness, in the long term leading to burnout.

The fatigue of constant scrutiny has also resulted in employees simulating work in virtual conditions. On online forums, one can read how the system for monitoring employee work (mouse movement tracer) was bypassed. Internet users wrote about setting an alarm on their phones every 10 minutes to remind them to „nudge" the mouse so that the supervisor could see that the employee was working.

## Cyber work hygiene and work-life balance

Occupational health and safety are important elements of every work activity. Prior to the outbreak of the pandemic, certain issues were treated very marginally. Putting it very simply, one could apply the principle – since the employee was in the workplace it meant that they were busy doing some work. The tasks done under the watchful eye of a supervisor were monitored all the time; therefore, the shift to a remote work system resulted in a sense of loss of control over the employee. Various methods were used to check whether the employee was actually working: the aforementioned unexpected phone calls to see how quickly the employee would answer, emails, often with trivial matters and with a requirement for an immediate response, or mouse tracking programmes. Other ways of monitoring work also involved installing applications which track employees' browser histories and send screenshots. Surfing the Internet for sites unrelated to the assigned task became grounds for a reprimand and even disciplinary dismissal. The need to control employees took the form of a myriad of tables, reports and accounts, all of which were intended to allow the monitoring of an employee's progress. The amount of documentation sent to confirm the performance of professional duties increased dramatically and put additional strain on employees. Reporting became a way to verify the effectiveness of an employee's work. Workers would send their superiors the work agenda for the day in the morning and at the end of the day a report on its implementation and possible deviations. This type of behaviour only confirms that we were not prepared to work in a remote mode. Working online exposed the work culture or rather the lack of it in all aspects, because as Z. Wolk (2009) points out, work culture can be considered in a variety of dimensions, such as technical, organizational, managerial, co-operational, health and safety and post-work rest. We can venture a statement that we have passed the test on work culture with a sufficient grade. Overnight, millions of people around the world switched to a home office system of work, but without much preparation or any transparent rules and principles, and sometimes even without training and the necessary equipment. Some employees have been left to fend for themselves, with the need to fulfil an increased number of duties at the highest possible level, and with a permanent sense of surveillance and mistrust on the part of the employer. Remote work disrupts the „natural" two-track work-home rhythm that has been practised for many years. The transition from role to role, from the role of a parent to the role

of an employee, takes place within remote work mode several times a day in the same „home-office" space. Such situations throw people off the balance, distract and prevent them from focusing on the task at hand, which is necessary to perform one's professional responsibilities. This situation has particularly affected women. Pracuj.pl's research shows that it is working parents – especially women – who have felt the consequences of the transition to remote work most strongly. With the closure of schools and the resulting remote education, working mothers, along with performing their professional duties, would solve a number of technical problems as well as support their children.

The challenge facing employers is to prevent employees from feeling abandoned and isolated. It can be noted that in the era of cyber work and *zoomism*, the boundary between work time and leisure has blurred. Being at home during the pandemic meant being at work. A new type of worker availability has emerged – available 24/7. Answering and receiving emails in the late evening hours seemed to surprise no one at the time. This situation was compounded by the fear of job insecurity, especially at a time when layoffs have increased.

Addressing the topic of cyber work hygiene, one must also refer to the space in which it is performed. In many cases, focus and relative quiet are needed, which means an isolated room, not to mention the place where the work is directly performed, i.e. the desk. The living room or kitchen would often become the home-office headquarters. The home space disappeared, was annexed and adapted into a workstation along with documentation and necessary equipment (Baranska, 2021).

The issue of employee availability requires the necessary attention. Working online does not mean working 24/7, therefore, in this unique situation, we must all learn anew to respect leisure time. The validity of dividing the day into three eight-hour sub-periods was already established by medieval Benedictines who followed the principle "omne trinum est perfectum" – everything triple is perfect, allocating 8 hours each for prayer, work for society and sleep. This principle was also used by the reformer Robert Owen who in 1817, during the industrial revolution, proposed to reduce working hours from 16 to 8 hours, which was a downright revolutionary move for the time (Taler, 2014), and in the 20th century became the standard in most countries. At present, international companies are testing a 4-day working week when studying efficiency levels. Research conducted by Jarrod Haar (2019) of the Auckland University of Technology, shows a 24% improvement in work-life balance, while longer recovery also affects energy levels at work.

This is where another challenge is drawn, namely, how to work efficiently but also relax effectively and be offline. Maintaining balance in the situation of permanently living in a home office is difficult. However, with help come various types of guides, in which one can find tips on how to (attempt to) maintain such a balance. Among the numerous tips, we can find 3 basic ones: firstly, we should keep to the usual morning routine, set the alarm clock (as we have done so far) and take care of time discipline. Start and finish work at the appointed times. Secondly, it is a good idea to get dressed. As the authors of the study point out, although working in pyjamas does not have a negative impact on our efficiency, it can negatively affect our psyche. Researchers from the Woolcock Institute of Medical Research, the Sydney University of Technology and the University of Sydney (2020) point out that changing clothes before work can have a positive effect on workers' mental health, similar to hospital patients, who are advised to wear pyjamas only at night. A third tip that can be useful is to try to find or create a space meant only for work. This should not be a couch, bed or kitchen top. It goes without saying that not everyone has the possibility to do so, but it is indispensable to screen off some space, set up a separate table with a chair, and arrange the workspace so that nothing distracts one from the tasks that need to be done or it happens as seldom as possible. There are many distractions, the noise outside the window, and clutter in the room where you work. In addition, the creation of a mini workstation allows you to remain well-organized with materials and documents in one place. It can be a cardboard box or a binder, which after the work is done is closed and opened the next day. Such a solution enables us to separate the workspace from home areas, as documents spread out on the kitchen table or on the couch along with an open business laptop make us feel like being at work all the time. For those who need an action plan, a "checklist" of tasks or an Eisenhower matrix will also work, which will allow you to control the situation by prioritizing activities. Working remotely does not relieve the employee of responsibility and attention to the quality of performance of work tasks. They should be completed to the highest possible standard, and by no means should they be interrupted by putting in laundry, watching a movie in the background or checking social media.

All of the aforementioned activities are meant to help maintain work-life balance. It would be naïve to think that these are universal solutions, as there are a number of other factors such as a partner also working remotely, children being at home or other people requiring care.

## Implications for labour pedagogy and labour educators

The pandemic has exposed years of neglect in many areas, from education to health care. Labour pedagogy, as a sub-discipline of pedagogy, focuses, among other things, on the processes of tutoring in a work situation, but also touches on areas related to professional tasks, the content of work, the conditions and processes of preparing a person for work, professional qualifications and competencies, employment and professional development. It is a subdiscipline which is strongly integrated with other labour sciences. The related fields and common areas encompass the philosophy of work, sociology of work, physiology of work, praxeology, ergonomics or psychology of work. The interdisciplinarity outlined above translates into a wide range of activities of labour educators, who are often employed as specialists in employee development, training and HR departments. The time of the pandemic and the return to a new reality for human resource professionals has undoubtedly been and continues to be a challenge. Market analysts indicate that the post-pandemic labour market will be an employer's market (Skalska, 2020). Employers and employees will undergo a vetting process. Processes related to building a positive image of the so-called employer of choice, which is at the heart of *employer branding*, will be subject to candidate evaluation. For future employees, the issues relating to the atmosphere in the workplace, the system of motivating, evaluating, and rewarding employees, and surveying their needs and level of satisfaction with their work will be important. What will also count is the attention paid to team integration, communication and the company's organizational culture. All of the aforementioned areas will be evaluated through the prism of caring for the employee during the pandemic, providing a sense of security and stability. Candidates, in turn, should expect an increase in online recruitment, which will be the initial verification, without the need to appear at the company's headquarters.

Undoubtedly, new professions will emerge as a natural consequence of market, economic and technological processes. A change in the way of thinking about life and work will project certain behaviours and needs. The notion of career, success and happiness will be redefined, and the process of setting goals will change. A focus on the accumulation of experiences and sensations, instead of material and ephemeral goods, will open up new market opportunities. Trend analysts indicate (Miszczak, 2020) that new or perhaps modernized professions and occupations will be in demand, which will help individuals find their way

in the new reality, build relationships anew, rebuild them, trust and work with other people. Among the sought-after and desirable professions, one may find happiness economy specialists who will support individuals in defining and acquiring happiness; super-mentors (psychologists, psychiatrists, therapists) offering support to individuals who experienced pandemic trauma, loneliness, death of a loved one, relationship breakdown, long-term unemployment or bankruptcy. They will be specialists offering real support in the process of (re)building a new life. The pandemic has shown very clearly the need for investment in health care, and, consequently, for specialists in holistic medicine, doctors of integrative medicine, with an extremely broad spectrum of knowledge and skills, who will take care of the patient comprehensively, instead of treating separate diseases. Their task will be to prevent, treat, and take care of the mental and physical condition, and apply therapies that minimize the intake of analgesics. In the subject literature, we will also find demand for trainers for the "new times". Pandemic time is the heyday of webinars, virtual training conferences, and e-courses, but also the development of platforms and tools for remote work. Online training is demanding, and continuous education is necessary; a trainer, an online educator must know how to build online courses, what content to choose, and what graphics to enrich them with to make them valuable for participants. The opportunities for earning money in this industry will be determined by the ability to sell one's services online, reach a target audience, brand recognition against others and high positive evaluation by the existing customers. Among the professions in demand are also artificial intelligence specialists, corporate meteorologists, cyber security specialists and compliance specialists.

The challenge for today's market and HR professionals is managing a hybrid team, i.e. one part of which works in a stationary mode and the other part remotely. The situation can become more complicated if the team is international and time zone differences interfere with the work process (Buffer, AngelList, 2020).

Working remotely has forced managers to take a completely different approach to managing their staff, and it goes to show that hybrid work will be here to stay for a long time. As already mentioned, the remote work model does not suit everyone. There can be many reasons for this, such as the lack of conditions for working from home, and the need for direct contact, which translates into a decrease in employee motivation. And it is the reduced motivation of employees that has proven to be a real challenge for leaders (Year of the Leader 2021).

Remote work will become more common, and tools for communication, remote teamwork or employee control will be improved.

## Conclusions. The new (old) reality

The current situation must be the determinant of any action taken in order to organize work processes. The pre-pandemic situation cannot be taken as a reference as the reality understood and defined in pre-pandemic terms will not return, which must be clearly emphasized. If the world and its functioning before the pandemic is taken as a benchmark, the crisis situation will not be overcome, and new solutions will be treated as temporary (Baranska, 2021). The pandemic should be approached as a kind of reboot, a new beginning which takes into account all the lessons learned. The pandemic and post-pandemic reality requires a new plan of action, and we all need to learn it. We need to work on changing the way we think about work, and accept the changes and unpredictability of the reality around us, including the market environment. We should treat it as an opportunity rather than a threat, learn, review the solutions used and choose the best ones, because similar situations like the 2020 lockdown may recur. The culture and ethics of online work, cyber hygiene which accurately specifies and indicates that work done in the online formula does not mean non-stop availability, adapting labour laws and operating under conditions of permanent change will affect the existence of companies. These very notions will have an impact on recruitment processes, the quantity and quality of job candidates, the commitment of employees, their work efficiency and their loyalty to the employer.

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