

SMART WORKING IN ORGANISATIONS OPERATING ON THE POLISH MARKET – OPPORTUNITIES AND LIMITATIONS

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Purpose: The aim of this study is to reflect on the essence of smart working and analysis of the possibilities of applying this concept in organisations operating on the Polish market.

Design/methodology/approach: The study undertakes to review literature in order to consider the definition of smart working. Various forms of work that embrace this model and the provisions of Polish labour law that are important for its implementation in organisations have been analysed.

Findings: The article indicates challenges connected with adapting solutions to the provisions of the Polish Labour Law and educating management staff.

Originality/value: The article characterises smart working - a work model responding to the needs of the 5.0 economy. The elements constituting this model have been described. Moreover, the conditions that must be fulfilled in order to implement smart working in organisations operating on the Polish market have been indicated.

Keywords: Smart working, economy 5.0, Polish Labour Law, nomadic work, smart office.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

Over recent years, we have seen a complete change in the approach to remote work. Before 2020, i.e., in what could be called *pre-pandemic times*, remote work was a privilege available only to a selected few. Millions of employees forced to commute to the office every day looked with a mixture of admiration and envy at those who were allowed to perform their duties remotely. During the COVID-19 pandemic, remote work became a necessity. Sanitary requirements and lockdown left offices empty; employees were not allowed to come to offices. That ban was a fairly painful experience for many people; There were many comments about the feeling of being trapped at home. Currently, in what we all wish to believe can be called *post-pandemic times*, remote work has become a choice. This choice, as evidenced

by many studies cited in this article, most often takes the form of hybrid work. This hybrid is usually understood in a superficial way and is limited to considering how many days (weekly) an employee should spend in the office and how many at home. It is time to change this approach, taking another step towards shaping a modern work model. It is smart working - a work model adapted to the needs of both the employer and the employee. The presented article characterises this concept and analyses the opportunities and limitations related to the implementation of smart working in organisations operating on the Polish market.

2. What is smart working?

In short, smart working implies selecting a way of working tailored to the needs of both the employee and the employer (Bednar, Welch, 2020). It may take the form of remote work and office work - the office should also be *intelligent*. Not only does *smart office* positively impact the comfort of performing tasks, but it also stimulates creativity and cooperation between onsite and remote employees. This is currently one of the most critical challenges to be resolved. Research conducted in numerous organisations reveals that people working remotely feel as though they were becoming second-class employees (Sidor-Rządkowska, 2021, p. 78). Smart working eliminates these concerns by offering a range of various forms: office work, remote work (both at home and nomadic), coworking and the so-called hybrid work, which is a combination of these forms. Smart working is based on the belief that the choice of where to perform professional duties should not be limited to the alternative: working from home or working in the company's office (headquarters). One should consider other options in order to provide all employees with the workplace that is most conducive to the effective implementation of their tasks (Iannotta et al., 2020).

Remote work is essentially working from anywhere in the world. As Szapar (2021, p. 18) notes: "Everyone whose main work tool is a computer has a unique opportunity to re-evaluate their everyday life." This re-evaluation increasingly takes the form of nomadic work. The term "nomad" is used today to refer to people who work remotely and live in many different places without having a permanent address. It is estimated that by 2035, up to one billion people around the world will be considered digital nomads (Hatańska, 2022).

Nomadism is not a homogeneous phenomenon as its degrees vary. We can distinguish at least three basic types here (Szapar, 2021, pp. 56-57). The first one is the so-called *workationist* – a person who is away for no longer than a few weeks. During the trip, they work full-time, and after work may indulge in typical holiday pleasures in "beautiful scenery". In Poland, the most popular places among workationists are, obviously, the mountains (with particular emphasis on the Bieszczady Mountains), Masuria and seaside towns. A person who moves to a chosen place for a long time (usually to warm countries) is called a *slowmad*. They usually

want to change the environment for a while or escape from winter, while maintaining a permanent foothold. *Digital nomad* is an employee who completely resigns from the aforementioned foothold. With the so-called one backpack (in practice-several suitcases), they embark on the voyage around the world, stopping for longer in selected places. They are usually a freelancer, although this is not a necessary condition - more and more companies allow their employees to perform their professional duties in a nomadic manner. However, they are usually not obliged to have daily contacts with the employer; the working time of a digital nomad is most often determined by the deadline for completing the project.

Reports show that nomadic work is developing dynamically, especially in the IT industry where it has had long tradition. It is believed that effects of work are crucial rather than the place and time of performing particular tasks.

3. Smart working and economy 5.0

The modern economy is sometimes referred to as the 4.0 economy. It is the economy that responds to the needs of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. One should explain why the technical revolution in which we (more or less consciously) participate is called the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Where does the number in this concept come from? The First Industrial Revolution was the breakthrough that resulted in the age of steam. The symbol here is the weaving loom invented in 1782. It initiated the development of craft production supported by the power of water and steam. The beginning of the Second Industrial Revolution dates back to 1913 - the world's first production line was introduced at the Ford factory. The period of this revolution was crucial for the development of management theory. A large number of contemporary researchers refer to scientific studies performed during the Second Industrial Revolution, and the names of Frederic Taylor, Karol Adamiecki and Edwin Hauswald are known (or at least should be known) to all graduates. 1969 is considered the beginning of the Third Industrial Revolution - it was then that a programmed logic system was invented as computers became popular. The current breakthrough - the Fourth Industrial Revolution (its beginning dates back to 1989) is associated with the invention of the Internet, which led to the explosion of innovative solutions (Kosieradzka, Zawila-Niedzwiecki, 2018, p. 10).

This fourth breakthrough is happening at the fastest pace in history and has the widest reach - it affects every aspect of our lives - work, health, interpersonal relationships, etc. (Blichacz 2023, p. 15). Recently, the concept of a fifth revolution has emerged - for several years now 5.0 economy has been discussed, the essence of which involves building sustainable relationships between increasingly intelligent technologies and people (Akundi et al., 2022; Weiner, 2022).

As Joanna Moczydłowska (2023, p. 164) observes, the 5.0 economy model is based on three basic pillars, that is ecology, man, and crisis resistance. Let us try to describe these pillars in the context of smart working.

I. Ecology. The pandemic has made everyone who did not understand it yet realise what a tragic condition our planet is in and how urgent actions are required to stop the degradation process. Smart working addresses this need as it helps to eliminate the need to travel to the workplace every day and thus significantly reduces exhaust emissions. It was the very concern of Jack M. Nilles, an American physicist and engineer, widely considered the father of remote work. When introducing this concept, Nilles writes: “One morning I was driving (alone, like most highway users) from home to university. As usual, the traffic on the Santa Monica Freeway was moving in spurts: forward and stop, forward and stop. That morning I was stuck helplessly on the highway, staring at the almost endless string of red brake lights of the cars in front of me. (...) The proverbial light went on in my head. Revelation. It was an extremely simple, yet powerful idea. One that could change the world” (Nilles, 2003, pp. 6-7). Research conducted in 2020-2023 clearly shows that the ability to avoid commuting to the workplace is generally considered to be the greatest advantage of remote work.

II. Man. Economy 4.0 put technology at the centre, while Industry 5.0 is developing under the slogan that people must be at the centre of all processes. People employed in an organisation are its main stakeholders; concern for their well-being is a condition for the effective operation of the company. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, much attention has been paid to building well-being programmes (Mołek-Winiarska, Mikołajczyk, 2022). One of the most important benefits of these programmes is the ability to choose where and how to work.

III. Crisis resilience. The COVID-19 pandemic and the outbreak of the war in Ukraine have shown how important crisis management is. One of the fundamental elements of such management is building resilience at the level of individuals, teams and entire organisations. Smart working and the ability to respond with flexibility to the unpredictable events will definitely help to build such resilience.

4. Smart working and work hybrid

The term "hybrid" relates to a work model in which some duties are performed at the company's headquarters, while some - remotely (usually in the home office system). Creating an effectively functioning hybrid is not an easy task - the belief that hybrid work somehow automatically combines the best of both remote and stationary work may be a manifestation of wishful thinking rather than the real experience of employees and managers (Sidor-Rządkowska, Sienkiewicz, 2023, p. 184).

In order to better understand the scale of the challenges, one should remember that behind the broad term "hybrid work" there are dozens of solutions applied in practice. When trying to organise these solutions, we should consider this issue from two points of view, that is a) the employee, b) the company as a whole.

Ad a) As regards the employee's point of view, we can distinguish three basic models of hybrid work:

1. **Classic hybrid work** – that is a specific balance between the number of days spent working in the office and the number of days one works remotely (the proportions are 2:3 or 3:2 assuming a five-day working week). It is assumed that the term "hybrid work" without any additional adjectives or terms refers to this work model.
2. **Hybrid office work first** – involves the advantage of onsite work; most often 4 days in the office and 1 day of remote work.
3. **Hybrid remote work first** – involves the advantage of performing duties remotely; most often 4 days of remote work and 1 day in the office.

Ad b) From the point of view of the company as a whole, we can distinguish two basic solutions for hybrid work:

- I. Everyone (or almost everyone - the exception may be e.g., security staff) performs some of their duties in the office and some remotely. Previously, we distinguished three basic types of such work: classic, office first and remote first. Each of them may apply to all employees or be different for various groups.
- II. Some employees of a given company work in the office, some remotely. Such solutions are typical especially for manufacturing companies where technological requirements force the constant presence of certain groups of employees at the company's headquarters. Here, the proportions regarding the number of people are usually expressed in percentages: 30%: 70%, 80%: 20%, 60%: 40%, etc. This is still a simplified variant - it does not consider those who work in the hybrid mode, performing some of their duties remotely, and some - onsite.

In practice, the situations presented above overlap. For example, in one company, approximately 35% of employees work 3 days in the office and 2 days at home, 25% - 2 days in the office and 3 days at home, 15% - 4 days in the office, 1 day at home, 10% – 4 days in the office, 1 day at home. It should be added that 8% of people work only in the office, while 7% - only at home. The scale of management problems that such a company's operation entails is enormous.

The hybrid work model (in all the varieties presented here) has become widespread; Research conducted among management staff (presidents, board members and directors of corporations operating on the Polish market) shows that hybrid work operates in 89% (!) of organisations. Only 6% allow only work in the office, while 5% - only remote work (Hybrid, Beyond, 2022). All the mentioned types of hybrid work are used (with a huge advantage of the classical model).

5. Smart office – an office for all or an office for everyone?

The idea of a smart office is to adapt office space to the contemporary market needs, which revolve around reducing business costs while increasing efficiency. Modern offices are intended not only to have a positive impact on the comfort of work itself, but also to stimulate creativity and provide space that will meet the needs of various groups of employees.

The importance of smart office is growing with increasing digitisation. Jeremy Myerson and Catherine Greene (cited in: Dudek, 2019a, pp. 216-221) assume that the mobility of knowledge workers (understood as performing professional duties outside the office) is a fact; individuals differ only in the degree of this mobility. From this point of view, the authors distinguish four groups of employees, giving them figurative names: *the anchors*, *the connectors*, *the gatherers*, *the navigators*. Let us try to describe them in more detail.

The anchors – this group includes people who need an office routine for their daily operations. They want to come to work at the same time every day, meet co-workers, complete their tasks and leave the company with a sense of duty well fulfilled. This group includes both those who are motivated by the presence of other people and those who do not have the conditions to work at home and/or do not like working there. *Anchors* wish to have their own room in the office (or at least a clearly separated area that ensures uninterrupted work), their desk, and a place to store documents and personal items. People belonging to this group play an important role in the organisation - for other employees they are both a source of information and a symbol of the company's continuity.

The connectors are employees who thrive on *the exchange of information* and knowledge. They spend no more than half of their working time at their desk; in the remaining time they move around the company, working with different people and putting them in contact with each other. It is easy to adapt to changes in the organisation of office space, but they like to have a lot of space at their disposal. This allows them to freely present to their colleagues what they are currently working on, listen to their opinions, seek advice and guidance.

The gatherers – this group includes highly mobile employees who spend most of their time outside the office. Their role is mainly to represent the company externally. They usually spend their working time meeting clients and making new contacts. They generally do not feel the need to have their own desk; Space shared with other employees of the organisation is sufficient for them.

The navigators - a characteristic feature of the discussed group of employees is "sailing on seas and oceans" with various duties and only occasionally calling at the port of the company. This mode is used, for example, by salespeople performing their duties in various parts of the country. They expect that during their (rare) visits to the company, they will be treated as full staff members and will be met with kindness, a friendly atmosphere and good working conditions.

Another classification divides modern office workers into four main groups, these are:

Residents – employees spending over 70% of their working time at a desk. Only in exceptional situations do they work remotely and rarely participate in meetings. The type of tasks they perform requires a lot of concentration. Therefore, they need to be provided a space enabling concentration, offering acoustic and ergonomic comfort. A valuable convenience may be, for example, high-class armchairs and desks with adjustable top height.

Networkers – on average, they spend 40-70% of their working time at their desks. They sometimes perform their duties remotely and often work in teams. For networkers, the most important thing is a comfortable meeting place with colleagues that allows for open communication.

Nomads – this group of employees spends no more than 30% of their working time at their desk. The remaining time passes in constant motion. They appreciate unrestricted access to spaces where they can quickly start working with a laptop or conduct a conversation.

Field workers – they only appear in the office occasionally. However, they expect that there will be a comfortable, easily accessible workplace waiting for them (2017).

The experience of the pandemic period led to the belief that the office should primarily perform activating and social functions. It is supposed to provide what remote work does not, that is the need to "leave home" and maintain direct contact with colleagues. Experts from Antal and Cushman & Wakefield wrote already in the fifth month of the epidemic: "Remote work will probably stay with us for a long time, thus office space will have a new function - it will be an inspiring place that will build and support the culture of the organisation, facilitate the learning process, encourage building bonds between colleagues and clients and foster creativity and innovation" (Elasticity of specialists and managers..., 2020, p. 8).

The previously described spread of the hybrid model, combining work in the office with remote work, poses particular challenges to the concept of smart office. New classifications are emerging, taking into account employees' expectations towards office space. One of the most interesting is the proposal of Colliers researchers, who in 2020-2022 conducted a study to answer the question of how the behaviour of different people is shaped in hybrid work conditions (Osiecka, 2022). This research led to the identification of three styles, which were given the following names: *Analytical Albert*, *Collaboration Claire*, *Varied Victor*. Let us try to briefly describe the characters behind these styles:

Analytical Albert - the working day of a person characterised by this style is dominated by focused individual tasks. Individuals representing this style focus predominantly on the ability to concentrate on the tasks at hand. They prefer working from home (assuming they have appropriate conditions for this). The purpose of coming to the office is to hold direct meetings with colleagues, deal with matters requiring paper documentation, and use a workstation equipped with modern tools. In the office, *Analytical Albert* becomes the life of the party, wishing to make the most of the time spent in this space.

- *Collaboration Claire* – this style of work is the opposite of Albert's style. The dominant part of *Claire's* working day consists of various types of meetings and social interactions. Despite the differences mentioned above, the basic purpose for which *Claire* comes to the office is similar to Albert's - it is to hold direct meetings with colleagues. *Claire* starts their day at the office by drinking morning coffee, treating this activity as an opportunity to have a whole series of spontaneous meetings. Then, *Claire* starts scheduled meetings. They are very diverse in nature - one-to-one conversations, meetings in small teams, workshops and discussion groups. The latter are often attended by a large group of people - some onsite, some remotely. Thus, *Claire* expects access to meeting rooms of various sizes and types, conducive to both individual conversations and videoconferencing. They need to be able to check who will be in the office on a given day - such information is crucial.
- *Varied Victor* - a characteristic feature here is the inability to indicate dominant tasks; meetings, individual work, telephone calls, work with documents, and other activities play an important role. It is also worth emphasising that this style of working in the office does not differ significantly from that of working remotely, which makes it difficult to clearly determine the purpose for which *Victor* comes to the office. On the one hand, it is - as in the case of the previous styles - the desire to hold direct meetings with colleagues and the desire to use devices that facilitate work. On the other hand, going to the office allows one to access documents, many of which are still paper and waiting for *Victor's* signature (a person who often holds managerial positions). There is also a third side - going to the office is for *Victor* an important (although they are not always fully aware of the fact) element of shaping their professional career. It builds a sense of proper image management and allows one to avoid the situation of "being unnoticed".

There could be many divisions and classifications. Regardless of the names used, one thing is certain - various types of employee activity result in different expectations regarding office space. The demands formulated more and more often by both architects and people managing organisations may be reduced to the following slogan: it is time to move away from designing offices for all and start designing an office for everyone. Therefore, it is necessary to recognise and consider the needs of various groups of employees. The smart office concept addresses this need.

6. Smart working and Polish labour law

From April 2023, the amended Labour Code, which includes provisions on remote work has been in force. According to these regulations, one may work outside the company's headquarters on a full or partial basis. The latter option involves, in practice, hybrid work (the concept of hybrid, as the concept of smart working, does not appear in the document in question).

However, the place of work must always be reported to the employer. In addition, the employee must be within reach of means of direct distance communication, i.e., have access to the Internet.

Remote work may take place either on the basis of an agreement between the employee and the employer or on the basis of previously defined organisational regulations. If the company does not have an agreement or regulations regarding remote work, this mode of work may be performed at the request of the interested employee. There are groups of employees for whom the employer (if the specificity of the tasks performed allows it) is obliged to positively consider the application in question. These groups are:

- pregnant women,
- parents raising children up to 4 years of age,
- parents raising children with a disability or having an opinion on the need for early support for the child's development,
- people caring for immediate family members with a disability certificate who live in the same household.

The Labour Code in force from April 2023 also introduces the concept of remote work on demand. If the nature of the duties performed allows it, the employee has the right to use 24 days a year to work remotely. All they need to do is submit an appropriate application and the employer will accept it. The legislator's intention was to take into account various situations in the employee's life that make it difficult for them to be present at the company's headquarters. On-demand remote work is sometimes referred to as occasional remote work.

7. Conclusions

The analyses conducted indicated that smart working in organisations operating on the Polish market has great opportunities for development. This is facilitated by the following factors:

- Remote work experience accumulated over recent years.
- Expectations of employees for whom the possibility of combining work in the office with remote work is becoming one of the main criteria for choosing an employer.
- The amendment to Polish Labour Law made in 2023.

However, there are also many limitations, such as:

- Organisational difficulties related to managing units and teams combining work in the office with remote work.
- The belief that remote work always means working from home;
- Lack of experience in creating office space in hybrid working conditions;
- Tendencies to justify reluctance to take action with (imaginary) legal barriers.

In order to eliminate these limitations, it is necessary to disseminate good practices and conduct educational activities aimed at the managerial staff of organisations operating on the Polish market.

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