



TWING PROJECT

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1. Introduction

1.1 Prevalence

Before discussing the prevalence of teleworking, it should be noted, which will be discussed in more detail in Section 3, that in Poland the term 'remote work' (in Polish: 'praca zdalna') is usually used to describe work conducted outside the employer's premises (e.g. from home) instead of the term 'teleworking' (in Polish: 'telepraca'). This is important because of the definitions included in the labour law, which determined the scope of data published as part of official statistics. Until 2020, only the term 'teleworking' functioned in Polish labour law, and - importantly - in the published public statistics it was indicated in relation to cases of use strictly based on the provisions of the Labour Code. In other words, only people whose employment contracts contained clauses on the use of telework under Chapter IIb of the Labour Code were included in the statistics. Studies such as the Statistical Yearbook of Labour (e.g. Statistics Poland 2019) or the quarterly information Economic Activity of the Polish Population (based on the Polish Labour Force Survey, LFS) (e.g. Statistics Poland 2018) lacked information on remote work defined differently, such as the share of all those working from home in the total working population in the country – despite the fact that these data were collected as part of the LFS and published by Eurostat.

Moreover, data on the share of teleworkers were given little exposure and were not broken down by narrower socio-demographic categories¹ (with the exception of the breakdown between private and public sector employees – see e.g. Statistics Poland 2019: 120).

From 2020 onwards, i.e. since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, additional information on the number/share of employees working from home has been introduced in the Polish quarterly LFS studies, broken down into those working in this way usually and sometimes, and specifying those working from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic, those working remotely or teleworking (in total) and in statistical cross-sections by age group, gender and place of residence (rural/urban) (cf. e.g. Statistics Poland 2021 with tabular annexes).

Data on the number of teleworkers between 2014 and 2021 are included in Table 1.

¹ The latter was undoubtedly related to the very few cases where the provisions of the Labour Code on teleworking were applied.

Table 1. Number of teleworkers between 2014 and 2021 (in thousands).

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
In total	7.6	8.2	12.3	18.4	22.0	28.2	32.4	27.5
Women	3.4	3.9	5.7	8.5	10.9	13.6	14.7	13.6

Source: Statistics Poland (2015-2022) *Employed in the national economy*, Warsaw.

As the presented data indicate, the number of teleworkers working on the basis of the provisions of Chapter IIb of the Labour Code constitutes a negligible percentage (at most about 0.2% in 2020) of the total number of people working in Poland (about 16.5 million in 2021). An attempt to explain this state of affairs will be made in the third part, when discussing national regulations on teleworking.

Data on the share of working from home in the total workforce in Poland are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Share of working from home in total workforce 2014-2021 (in %).

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Usually	4.6	5.6	5.3	4.5	4.6	4.6	8.9	6.9	4.9
Usually - women	4.8	5.7	5.5	4.7	4.7	4.9	10.5	7.8	5.2
Sometimes	8.5	10.2	9.4	9.1	9.4	9.8	9.2	8.4	7.7
Sometimes - women	9.3	10.7	9.7	9.3	9.6	9.9	10.0	9.1	8.3

Źródło: Labour Force Survey/Eurostat

As can be seen, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic brought a significant, albeit not revolutionary, increase in the share of working from home in the total working population in Poland on an annual average basis. Slightly greater dynamics can be seen when the quarterly data are analysed – presented in Table 3. Unfortunately, in 2020 Statistics Poland did not disclose the number of people working from home sometimes.

Table 3: Share of homeworkers in total workforce from the first quarter of 2020 to the third quarter of 2022 (in %).

	1Q '20	2Q '20	3Q '20	4Q '20	1Q '21	2Q '21	3Q '21	4Q '21	1Q '22	2Q '22	3Q '22
Usually	6.4 (14.2 ²)	13.1	6.8	9.7	9.8	7.7	5.4	5.3	5.7	4.9	4.5
Usually - women	6.9 (16.5 ³)	16.8	n/a ⁴	11.4	12.0	8.6	5.2	5.8	6.2	5.2	4.7
Sometimes	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	9.8	9.2	7.2	7.9	9.0	7.5	6.8
Sometimes - women	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	10.7	10.1	7.6	8.5	10.0	8.1	6.9

Source: Tabular annexes to quarterly information on economic activity of the population of Poland, Statistics Poland (2020-2022); n/a = not available

The above figures seem rather surprising, as they suggest a significant decrease in the use of working from home in year 2022, during which the pandemic condition was lifted in spring. In the light of everyday observations (which in themselves cannot constitute evidence due to their anecdotal nature⁵), it does not seem that such a small share of workers (actually smaller than in 2019) are using various teleworking solutions. Perhaps the way the Labour Force

² During the last two weeks of the first quarter of 2020.

³ During the last two weeks of the first quarter of 2020.

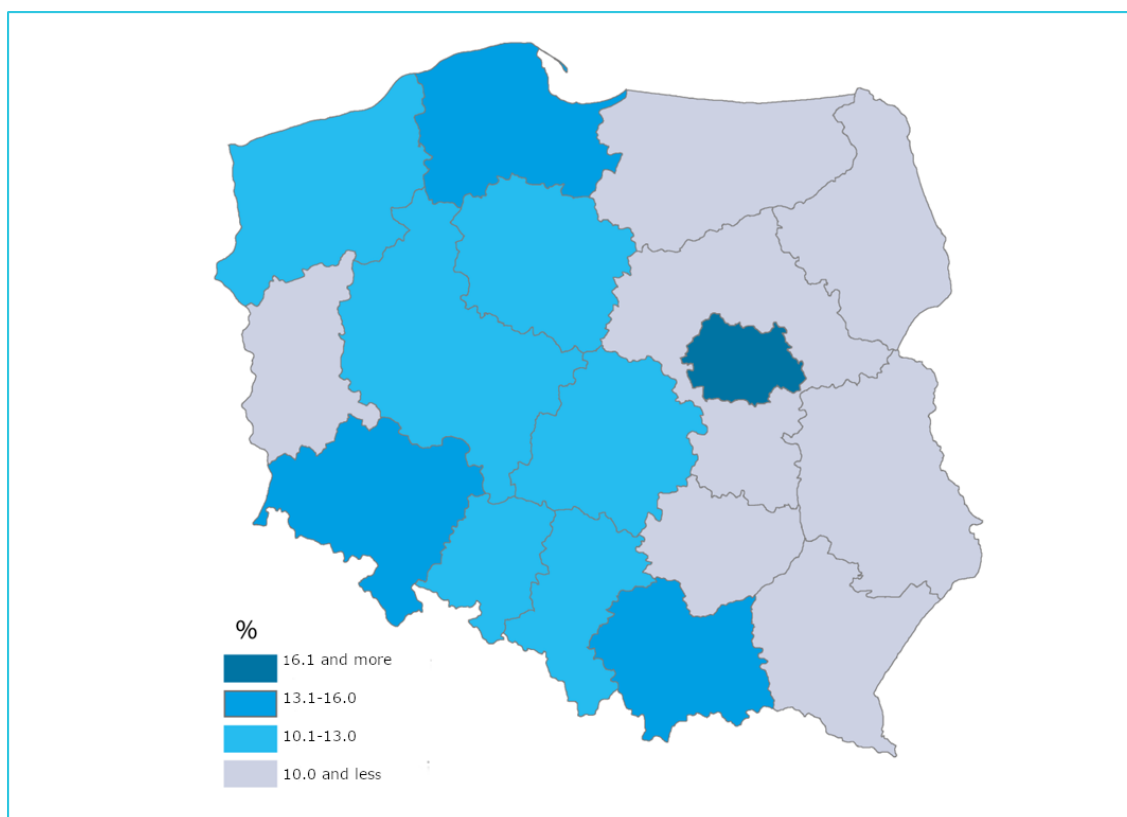
⁴ Due to incorrect data.

⁵ There have also, however, been more systematic, albeit qualitative, studies, such as in the project “IRSmart - Industrial Relations for Smart-Workers in Smart Cities” (call: VP/2020/004), conducted with funding from the European Commission under the guidance of the University of Ferrara, in which the Institute of Public Affairs participated. The project involved, among other things, a case study involving a large bank operating throughout Poland. The study found that around half of the 10 000 employees were given the opportunity to work from home as a result of the pandemic, which was maintained, in a hybrid formula, even after the pandemic had ended. The case study will be included in an appendix to the comparative report (to be released in summer 2023).

Survey questions are asked in Poland leads to underestimation of the percentage of teleworkers, although it is difficult to identify some linguistic or logical reasons for this. Undoubtedly, this situation requires further clarification.

Statistics Poland also published the result of an analysis of the regional distribution of people working from home in the first quarter of 2021. It shows that a significantly higher share of employees working away from their employer's premises was observed in highly urbanised and industrialised voivodeships (regions) mainly in the western part of the country and the Warsaw sub-region (where the percentage exceeded 16%), while in the eastern, predominantly rural voivodeships it was below 10%. The data is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Share of employees working from home in total workforce by region in the first quarter of 2021



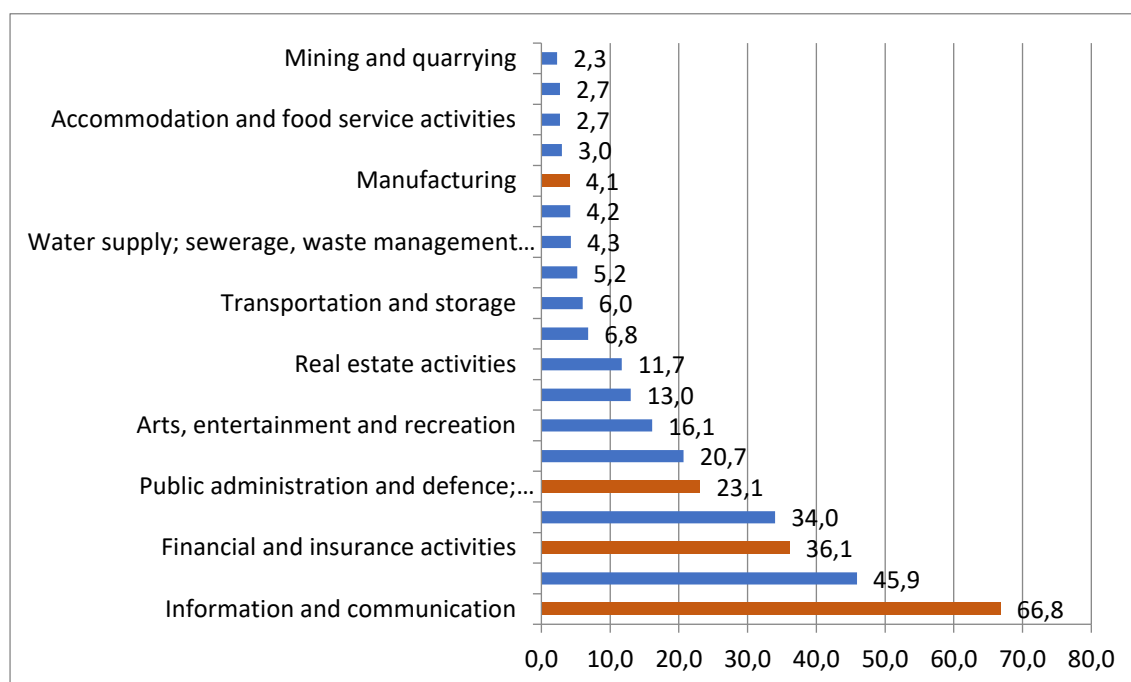
Source: Statistics Poland (2021) *Impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on selected elements of the labour market in Poland in the first quarter of 2021*. Warsaw

The analysis of the prevalence of working from home also covered economic sectors. The data are presented in Figure 2 on page 8. It should be noted that the broad NACE sections (denoted by letters) were adopted here and therefore do not fully correspond to the more narrowly defined sectors for the purposes of this study (defined as divisions: 20, 62, 62 and

84). This is particularly the case for the section covering manufacturing, which includes a very wide range of other industries (NACE 10-33) in addition to the chemical sector (NACE 20) which is the subject of the analysis in the TWING project. For a further two sectors, the sections also include other activities, but not as wide a range of them. Regarding ICT consultancy and related activities, in addition to the division 62 being under scrutiny, the section includes divisions 58-63, i.e. activities such as publishing, film production, television broadcasting and telecommunications. Section K, on the other hand, includes insurance and support activities in addition to the financial activities covered in this study. Only Section O (Public administration and economic and social policy) is entirely identical to a single NACE division 84.

However, it appears that - despite the concerns made above - the broad NACE sections discussed here are characterised by a certain homogeneity in terms of teleworkability due to the general nature of the typical tasks performed by employees, thus giving some idea of the situation in the sectors covered by the study. As can be seen, there are significant differences among them - the areas of interest fell on a very different spectrum of teleworkability. On the one hand, in the chemical industry, the share of teleworkers is marginal, which is due to the nature of the dominant tasks: direct participation in the operation of complex technological processes located at the company's premises. The issue of safety and potential environmental impact is also relevant here. This is followed by sectors including public administration and financial services, characterised by an above-average proportion of teleworkers compared to the economy as a whole, albeit still clearly less than half. In these areas of activity, many tasks can be conducted by teleworking, although there are significant limitations, primarily due to the need to handle face-to-face certain categories of clients or to process certain types of documents. Finally, at the very end of the spectrum, with a share of teleworkers as high as two-thirds, is the 'information and telecommunications' section, which includes the NACE division 62 analysed in this report. Here, the nature of the tasks offers the greatest opportunities for various forms of off-site work, as the main focus of the work is most often on various types of data or digital goods/services.

Figure 2. Share of employees working from home in total employment by broad economic sectors in Q1 2021



Source: Statistics Poland (2021) *Impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on selected elements of the labour market in Poland in the first quarter of 2021*. Warsaw

The variation in teleworkability across sectors has previously been explained by the nature of the tasks performed by workers by, among others, Sostero et al. (2020: 28-31). The cited work distinguishes three types of tasks: (1) those that are physical, by which, as a rule, cannot be performed remotely using existing technologies (this applies to the chemical industry), (2) those that are related to social interaction, which – unless they require physical contact – can be performed remotely, but often with a significant loss of quality (in many cases these are characteristics of tasks in the financial sector and public administration), and (3) related to the processing of information, which can usually be performed remotely without compromising quality, which fits well with most tasks in the IT sector.

In 2022, after the pandemic state was lifted by the government, employers gradually began to introduce hybrid working models, i.e. combining work at the employer's premises and at home, for many employees, especially in sectors with high teleworkability. Some quantitative aspects of the use of this solution were analysed by Deloitte in autumn 2022 (Deloitte 2022). At the same time, it should be noted that the methodology of this study makes it necessary to

draw rather cautious conclusions about the actual state of hybrid work use in the whole national economy⁶.

Among the employees surveyed, the largest category (24%) were those working from home three days a week. A complete lack of remote working was declared by only 11% of those surveyed, while 18% worked fully remotely. The higher the position in the company structure, the lower the average number of days working from home – for junior professionals it is around 3.5 days, while for directors it is just over 2 days and for board members it is around 1.5 days. Overall, executives use remote working for an average of two days per week, while all employees use it for an average of three (ibid: 6). In addition, the report includes data on the intensity of use of working from home in the finance and insurance and technology sectors (both sectors were unfortunately not defined in detail with reference to the NACE classification). For the former, up to 33% of employees declared that they work from home for three days, while only 7% indicated that they do not use remote working at all (ibid: 29). For the 'technology' sector, the figures are 30% and only 1% respectively. In addition, a very large proportion of employees declared that they work from home four or five days a week (26% in both cases) (ibid: 30). In conclusion, the authors of the report state that "hybrid working has emerged as a common working model in Poland" (ibid: 33).

2. Working conditions and main debates

The impact of remote working on working conditions in Poland was not a prominent topic in the public debate and academic literature prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. This does not mean that the issue was not addressed at all, although it was inferior in importance to other problems, such as the precarity caused by the use of certain forms of work. While the provision of work outside the employer's premises may have been one of the features of these arrangements, other features adversely affecting the situation of employees were highlighted, such as the lack of protection or weak protection of employment, lesser scope for compulsory social insurance covering the employee or the lack of regulations of the Labour Code in terms of occupational health and safety, working time, etc. At the same time, in view of the favourable situation on the labour market from the perspective of employees in

⁶ The main problems here are: the small sample (400 employees), its lack of randomness (or any other to ensure statistical representativeness), as well as the predominance of representatives from two sectors and the presence of only isolated representatives from other sectors of the economy.

the few years preceding the pandemic (low level of unemployment, significant shortages of workers, especially highly qualified ones), the possibility of working from home on selected days of the week has emerged as a kind of non-wage benefit, serving to encourage a valuable candidate to be employed by a given company or to keep a person already employed. In this context, remote working should be seen as a decidedly beneficial solution from the employee's perspective, and therefore generally unproblematic from the point of view of assessing the impact on working conditions. On the other hand, it undoubtedly poses a challenge for managers (the problem of controlling the actual working time and the way tasks are performed), and it has been analysed from this angle in a number of publications (e.g.: Wyrwicka & Trziszka [2019], Karbownik [2017]), although the economic benefits of implementing remote working in an organisation have also been analysed (e.g.: Twardowska [2016]). It is, however, the impact of remote work (teleworking) on working conditions and employee well-being that will be analysed below, with reference to four key dimensions: 1) working time and work-life balance, 2) control and surveillance, 3) Occupational safety and health, including mental and physical health and 4) equal treatment and non-discrimination.

2.1 General national evidence

Prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the impact of remote working on various aspects of working conditions was analysed, among others, by Jeran (2016), focusing on problematic issues, i.e. how it interferes with the realisation of different work functions in the light of the motivational theory of the ERG (which takes into account the impact of work on livelihood, its relational and developmental role). The author, conducting an extensive and in-depth analysis of the results of previous research (e.g. by Makowiec & Mikuła 2014, Sikora 2012, Furmanek 2015, Wyrzykowska 2014, Król 2013), indicates as a key problem the risk of unequal treatment of those working remotely, even despite the specific anti-discrimination provisions in the Labour Code in relation to the employment of teleworkers (see Section 3). This includes less access to the organisation's resources (both material and information), but also training or promotion opportunities (due to the employee not being noticed by superiors, having less chance to demonstrate additional achievements or less opportunity to influence others) (ibid: 54). The issue of control and maintaining communication with the employer was also raised. On the one hand, teleworking carries the risk of passing on to the employee the costs of maintaining contact with the employing party, while on the other hand, there is a focus of the control function on the outcomes of the work. In addition, the employee – not being able to count on supervision or direct feedback from the supervisor – has to be much more

self-disciplined than in a typical job, controlling the results of their work themselves. Additionally, it is the teleworker's responsibility to arrange their workstation and it is the teleworker who must endure inconvenience if they make mistakes in this regard, such as choosing non-ergonomic furniture.

The negative impact can also be on working time and, consequently, on work-life balance. The aforementioned focus of managers on work results stimulates the employee to put effort into achieving them. If an employee does not have sufficient skills to organise their work process, experiences distractions or makes mistakes in planning the time to perform his or her tasks (e.g. does not take breaks into account), there is a risk that their working time will increase and thus the actual hourly rate will be reduced. In the studies cited by the author, cases were identified where not only breaks but also annual leave or sick leave in the event of illness were given up. An additional problem is the likelihood of maintaining permanent contact with the supervisor, exchanging information with them, in the absence of a clear time frame in which such contact is to take place. This leaves the employee constantly at work – hence the boundary between private and professional life is blurred (ibid: 55).

The author also indicates significant threats to the work's function of maintaining social connections and relationships (ibid: 56-57). By not being physically present with colleagues, teleworkers cannot count on direct interaction with them, the exchange of information, small courtesies or showing mutual respect. This generates significant risks of a psychosocial nature – feelings of loneliness and isolation, the breaking of social bonds and the lack of receiving psychological reinforcement. Remote communication is only formal and verbal, which impoverishes the sphere of interaction and can lead to social withdrawal. Being at home makes it difficult to show signs of status and belonging to a professional group or organisation, to learn about the culture of that organisation, to feel a sense of belonging and shared responsibility for it, and contributes to a sense of exclusion from decision-making processes. The aforementioned constant indirect contact with the employer results, from a relational point of view, in a sense of being controlled rather than a sense of belonging. On the other hand, also the already mentioned extension of working hours beyond typical working time results in less time for leisure and family relationships, introduce stress and chaos into family life. In addition, in the long term, there may be further consequences of a professional or even economic nature. The individual does not build up social capital, which additionally weakens their chances of promotion (e.g. they have less chance of finding a new job, which is often done informally through social networks), and their socialisation into professional roles is also hampered.

Also from the perspective of the third dimension of the ERG concept, i.e. employee development and self-fulfilment, remote working can have negative consequences (ibid: 58-59). Here again, certain circumstances already suggested above play a role: the lack of direct relationships with other employees and superiors results in reduced informal learning which is an important part of professional development. Again in this context, a reduction in promotion opportunities (vertical or horizontal) has been indicated. Although the subsequent aftermath of the pandemic may have changed this to a large extent, the author also suggests a limitation in self-fulfilment resulting from the depreciation of working from home as being 'inferior' to traditional work at the employer's premises. Nor can an employee improve their self-esteem by identifying with the employer, its brand or its headquarters. The constant feeling of being remotely controlled by a supervisor as to the results of one's work can cause a fear of experimentation and improvement in methods of performing tasks due to the focus on immediate results.

On the other hand, being at the employer's disposal even outside typical working hours can lead to a reduction in self-development activities such as further education or hobbies. At the same time, how the 'mechanism' for not having enough time works will depend on the nature of the remote work. If it is conceptual work, requiring considerable creativity, the employee may additionally be absorbed by it almost 24 hours a day. Meanwhile, low-skilled work is likely to result in an additional prolongation of the work, as the employee can thus compensate for the low hourly rate in order to be able to make a living. Finally, a reduced sense of fulfilment at work may be due to the fact that a lot of effort has to be put into organising the remote work itself - much more independence and certain other competences are needed here that are not required when working at the employer's premises. These efforts and skills, however, are unlikely to be recognised by anyone.

Sęczkowska's (2019) analysis covers both the negative and positive effects of remote working, with a particular focus on psycho-social effects. She agrees with Jeran (2016) that teleworking can bring negative consequences for social relationships, reducing the quality of contacts with colleagues and superiors. Despite the multitude of solutions for remote communication and their undoubted advantages, using them introduces the risk of misunderstandings and ambiguities (Seczkowska 2019: 13). Extroverted people, in particular, may feel discouraged about their duties, which they can try to compensate for by intensifying family or social contacts. Another remedy is to rent coworking offices. In the author's opinion, remote working can foster workaholism, due to the lack of a clear time frame for work and the need to organise it independently. On the other hand, as in Jeran's assessment, promotion

(lack of recognition by the supervisor) may become problematic, as well as access to training, working on days off, giving up work breaks or vacation leaves. An important observation of the author is the risk of distraction in the home environment and a reduction in concentration levels, which can lead to a decrease in creativity and performing tasks at the last minute.

However, Sęczkowska (based on earlier analyses by: Lorenz 2011, Ślęzak 2012) indicates above all the positive effects of remote working. Firstly, it entails significant savings, both from the perspective of the employer and the employee. In the case of the latter, it is primarily about avoiding commuting costs – both financial and time-related. In addition, working away from the employer's premises makes it possible to find accommodation on the outskirts of the city, which leads to a lower cost of living, as well as allowing one to live in a more comfortable and healthy environment away from the city centre. A key advantage, however, is the flexibility of working time, which, with the right skills to organise it, allows a better work-life balance. "Instead of a work-home conflict, a facilitation of daily functioning can emerge" (ibid: 13). Work-life balance has a positive impact on the emotional sphere, reducing stress and improving relationships with the family. In addition, as long as the supervisor allows it (the author seems to take this for granted, which is only accurate in some cases), being able to adjust working hours to one's chronotype and preferred hours of activity further improves quality of life and job satisfaction. This, in turn, should also contribute to greater loyalty to the employer and commitment to work.

By improving work-life balance, the employee can devote more time to social engagement, which will contribute to improving the life of the community to which he or she belongs. Teleworking can also foster better mental and physical health by enabling hobbies and physical activity. The absence of noise and clamour in the workplace can in turn have a positive effect on concentration, increasing creativity and productivity. As can be seen from the above discussion, various studies and research sometimes come to conclusions that go in opposite directions. Undoubtedly, as the cited authors themselves suggest, the nature of the impact of teleworking on job quality depends on a number of individual factors, such as accommodation conditions, family situation or the personality characteristics of the employee.

In the period following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of studies have been carried out with the aim, among other things, of analysing the practices associated with the use of remote/hybrid working, the degree to which companies have implemented internal regulations concerning it, or, finally, the advantages and disadvantages of this way of

performing work duties, from both the employer's and the employee's perspective. Śliż (2020), on the basis of a survey with a non-probabilistic sample (n=117), conducted in April 2020, i.e. at the beginning of the pandemic, found that, in the opinion of respondents, clearly the most important advantages of remote working were flexible working hours and spending less time on public transport. In contrast, the negative aspects of teleworking were the lack of direct contact with other employees, the distraction resulting from working from home and the problem of separating work from home life. Single answers suggested technical problems (with internet connection, software)⁷. It should be borne in mind that at that time, remote work performed on a larger scale was something completely new for many employees in Poland. In addition, it was accompanied by other difficulties resulting from lockdown, including in particular the closure of schools and kindergartens, restrictions on the spatial mobility of the population or the closure of some services, including those related to recreation.

A similar study to the one described above, preceded by a more extensive analysis of foundational data and conducted on a sample of 327 purposively selected employees (54% of whom were women), was conducted by Dolot (2020). Respondents were asked, among other things, about the frequency of remote working, previous experience with it and its advantages and disadvantages. Those who already had experience with teleworking before the pandemic were asked to indicate separately the advantages and disadvantages they perceived during and before the pandemic. Referring to the pre-spring 2020 situation, reconciliation of work and personal obligations was most often suggested as an advantage of teleworking (more than 80% of indications), while around 70% of people rated it as enabling them to adapt their work to their personal needs as well as those of their relatives (ibid: 40). Half of the respondents selected the answer "saving time (e.g. for commuting)", and more than 40% considered that remote working fosters concentration, provides motivation for work, increases job satisfaction and allows tasks to be completed faster. Exactly 40% of those

⁷ Śliż's article contains some other interesting analyses beyond the topic of the impact of teleworking on working conditions. These include a bibliometric analysis, which showed that by April 2020 there were 306 Polish-language publications containing the keyword 'remote working' and 1,000 publications with the keyword 'teleworking'. At the same time, over the years, the term 'remote working' has gained in popularity at the expense of 'teleworking'. The author also found that previous publications could be divided into four groups based on how they covered the issue of remote working. These were: (1) legal aspects, (2) psychosocial aspects, (3) telework opportunities, benefits and limitations, and (4) characteristics of tools supporting use of remote work.

surveyed assessed that teleworking allows them to have more time for relatives. For just under 40% of respondents, teleworking allows them to have better and more creative ideas. The least popular answer (30% of respondents) was about feeling less controlled by a supervisor – which suggests that most managers had already developed ways or tools to control their subordinates remotely in the early stages of the pandemic.

The frequencies of indications of different aspects of teleworking in relation to the situation already after the pandemic outbreak were similar, with differences of up to 10%. However, there were two exceptions: significantly more respondents agreed with the statement that working remotely saves time (over 90%) and that it gives more time for relatives (almost 70%).

Assessments of the teleworking disadvantages, on the other hand, differ significantly with regard to the situation before and after the outbreak of the pandemic – It is clear that the hasty introduction of remote working under conditions of lockdown and the inconvenience it caused affected the well-being of those performing their duties from outside the employer's premises. The most frequently indicated disadvantage of teleworking prior to the pandemic, by just over 20% of respondents, was the abandonment of breaks during work (ibid: 40). Between 10 and 20% of the occurrences were the following disadvantages for the employee: lack of self-discipline, the feeling of being at work all the time, working at weekends, blurring of the boundary between work and personal life and lack of direct contact with colleagues. The least frequently indicated disadvantages (below 10% of the respondents for each) were: the difficulty in focusing due to the presence of other household members, the lack of support from the supervisor and co-workers and... the lack of control from the supervisor.

Already during the pandemic, the vast majority of respondents felt the negative impact of a lack of direct contact with colleagues (nearly 70% of responses), experienced a blurring of the boundaries between work and private life (more than 50% of indications) and a sense of being at work all the time (40%) (ibid). More than 30% complained about concentration problems due to the presence of other household members, and equally 30% indicated giving up breaks during work. Although relatively small, a much larger proportion of those surveyed than before the pandemic missed the support of colleagues (just over 20%), as well as the lack of support from their supervisor (about 15%). Even the percentage feeling a lack of supervisor control increased, though still below the 10% threshold.

The pandemic situation confirmed the potential for remote work to have a negative impact on employees' psychological well-being, caused mainly by a reduction in meetings and face-to-face relationships with colleagues, and the blurring of the boundaries between work and

private life, expanding the former's time at the expense of other spheres of life. At the same time, it should be borne in mind that additional circumstances (lockdown, the sudden transition of many people to remote work on a significant or even full-time basis) intensified these disadvantages.

The forced shift to remote work has also led to a reduction in physical activity for many people, according to a Central Institute for Occupational Protection (CIOP) survey on a sample of 359 employees conducted in April and May 2020 (Szczygielska 2020). Only 9% of respondents declared they used their work breaks for physical activity. Depending on the age group, breaks were used in different ways. For example, employees aged 26-35 allocated them to running various errands (a work-life-flow approach), while those aged 36-55 tended not to take breaks (ibid: 24).

The December 2020 survey of a sample of 956 employees (professionals and managers) largely confirmed earlier findings. Again, respondents negatively assessed the impact of remote work on interpersonal relationships: only 21% rated well or very well the opportunity to meet new people joining the company, 23% were positive about social life, 45% about the possibility of monitoring subordinates, and 49% about integration and cooperation (PARP 2021: 7). In turn, 84% indicated the benefit of reduced commuting, 82% were positive about communication with superiors, and 78% valued communication with team members. Positive evaluations also clearly prevailed for aspects such as job satisfaction, family life, and workplace ergonomics.

In conclusion, it is important to point out the complexity and ambiguity of the impact of teleworking on work-life balance. The literature review reveals the existence of some contradictory effects of telework when it comes to this aspect of employee well-being. One can even speak of a kind of "work-life balance paradox": on the one hand, teleworking saves time due to the lack of commuting to and from work, and allows the employee to organise the way he or she performs tasks more flexibly. On the other hand, however, it leads to a blurring of the boundaries between work and private life, a feeling of being at work all the time and often an extension of actual working hours. This problem should be addressed in detail at the fieldwork stage, taking into account the impact of different circumstances on the work-life balance problem (employee's housing conditions, family situation including the presence of dependants, employee's personality traits, etc.).

2.2 Sectoral evidence (ICT consultancy, financial activities, chemical industries and public administration)

Reports are available on the impact of remote work on the job quality in the financial sector and in public administration. A report dedicated to the impact of the pandemic on the functioning of the IT industry has also been identified (Szczycka et al. 2021), but the remote work threads in it focus on the impact on businesses. With regard to the financial sector, the findings presented below are from a study conducted in October and November 2020 with use of a survey on the sample of 172 employees enriched with 37 individual interviews (Pokojska et al. 2021).

The study showed that the introduction of remote work in connection with the pandemic was a revolutionary innovation for most employees in the sector. Previously, 67% of respondents worked only in the office, while only 23% used to work from home occasionally (ibid: 10). Almost 90% of respondents felt changes in the way work was performed due to the pandemic, of which 1/3 completely switched to remote work. Only 9% continued to work entirely in the office. The process of change was very rapid – for example, according to the quote from the interview, in spring 2020, a decision was made in one of the banks that within two weeks 70% of employees would start working from home. 83% of respondents assessed the transformation process positively, and the company's previous experience in the use of digital techniques was conducive to a high rating. At the same time, according to declarations, only 13% of respondents had a comprehensive remote work support system in their company before the pandemic. According to 53% of the respondents, such a system had been present, but it required significant refinement. According to the declarations of 29% of respondents, there had been no such system in their bank before the pandemic.

Despite in many cases a rather chaotic initial stage of introducing changes, employees found remote work to be generally beneficial for them quite quickly (ibid: 17-18). The most important advantages of working from home indicated by the respondents are: saving time (indicated by 83% of respondents), greater safety during a pandemic (72%), the possibility of working also in the case of minor health problems (66%), flexible working hours (57%), saving money (53%), being able to spend more time with relatives (43%) and being more focused (39%). In the interviews, however, certain nuisances were pointed out, which in the case of some employees limited the benefits of implementing remote work: equipment problems such as slow internet connection (even in towns near Warsaw), the presence of children at home using remote learning, or unsatisfactory housing conditions. As many as 36% of employees

declared that they had problems with combining caring and professional duties. Interestingly, excessive household duties burdened men and women to a similar extent (ibid: 19).

The list of the most frequently indicated disadvantages of working remotely largely coincides with those cited above. The largest number of respondents complained about the loosening of ties or loss of contact with other team members (53%) and the lack of a clear border between work and private life (47%) (ibid: 20). The following problems were further indicated: feeling of isolation and loneliness (42%), and the need to balance work with childcare and remote teaching (36%). 27% of respondents experienced communication problems, 18% lacked space to work, and 16% lacked the right equipment or working conditions as good as in the office. Also, 16% had to share their equipment and space with others, and 15% judged that remote work hindered their professional development. The least frequently indicated were: lower work efficiency (13%), difficulty in acquiring new knowledge and skills (9%), lack of motivation to work or poor organisation of it (8% each). Transitioning to remote working was accompanied by increased levels of stress and anxiety due to the inability to meet expectations, indicated by 31% of respondents. 11% of respondents did not have sufficient support from their supervisors. This also resulted in health problems (back pain, migraines), reported by 38% of respondents. In fact, a rather negative overall picture of the impact of remote working on employee wellbeing emerged from the survey, although it is very possible that this has subsequently improved as a result of adaptation to the new working system and the removal of a number of restrictions (abolition of lockdown, return of children to school, reinstatement of leisure services). Nevertheless, at the time of the survey in autumn 2020, only 16% of financial institution employees would agree to work remotely full-time once the pandemic is over (ibid: 21).

With regard to public administration, data are available from a survey of a sample of 363 employees of one of the ministries during the first lockdown in March-April 2020 (Szczepanski & Zamecki 2021). This survey, also, found that before the pandemic outbreak, work from home was done frequently or very frequently by a significant minority (10.2%) of employees. After the pandemic outbreak, remote working was undertaken by 83.4% of respondents, of whom 31.5% worked exclusively from home. 64.7% rated the ministry's preparedness to implement this way of working as '4' or '5' on a five-point scale (1 - worst rating, 5 - best rating). Their own experience of remote working was rated very good by 45.3% of respondents and good by 31.2%. Remote working would like to continue with the end of the pandemic 25.4% of respondents and partially 47.5%. The specific early period of implementation of remote working meant that among the disadvantages of this solution mainly problems of a technical

nature were indicated: difficulties with hardware, software, internet connection, arrangement of a workplace at home. The need for childcare, the difficulty of separating working time from family life and extended working hours, and the lack of social contacts were also mentioned (ibid: 20-21). Not all of the listed advantages of implementing remote working, in the light of other studies, are not entirely obvious: better time management (mentioned by 62% of respondents), the ability to focus on one task without being distracted by other tasks (49%), the possibility to work in the pleasant surroundings of one's own home (40%), and the possibility to deal with household matters at the same time (36%). The elimination of commuting and associated costs was also indicated.

According to the results of an online survey conducted in 2022 on a sample of 447 public administration employees as part of the DIGIQU@LPUB project, in which the Institute of Public Affairs participated, 14.9% of those working remotely occasionally felt pressure from their superiors to "logging in" during their free time, while 5.2% experienced this often. Pressure for such actions from the side of colleagues was 8.5% and 4.3%, respectively (Owczarek & Pańków 2023: 27). It would therefore appear that in this sector in Poland the issue of the right to disconnect is not very urgent. The overall assessment of telework by employees is positive according to the cited survey, with both the survey and the interviews revealing that the extent of remote working in public administration is not as great as employees would like it to be. The survey was conducted in mid-2022, a period when the pandemic state was already lifted (the epidemic emergency was still in force). 34% of respondents declared that remote working was not possible at their institution, 30% indicated hybrid working, and the same number said they could only do remote work because of the pandemic. Only 5% of respondents were able to work entirely from home (ibid). The survey showed that the impact of remote working on the situation of workers in the sector is positive, especially in relation to the possibility of combining home and work responsibilities (ibid.). Rather, the problem is the frequent inability to negotiate telework. In some institutions, the possibility to (partially) work from home is seen as a kind of reward that the employee has to earn, rather than as a typical work organisation arrangement (ibid).

3. Regulation

3.1 Regulatory framework and recent reforms at national level

The only so far identified form of telework regulation in Poland are generally applicable provisions of common law, in the form of the Labour Code and some other acts. Due to the lack of practice of publishing the content of collective agreements (only some enterprises or company-level trade unions do so), it is not possible to analyse the content of these documents in terms of provisions regarding remote work. It should be noted that the coverage of collective agreements in Poland is relatively small (in the financial sector it is in the range of 25-50% according to Eurofound [2019a], in the chemical sector it is undefined [see: Eurofound 2014], in central, regional and local public administration at most marginal, while there is a practice of consultation [see: Eurofound 2017, 2020], in the telecommunications and IT sector it was set at 8%, but this applies rather only to telecommunications companies [see: Eurofound 2019b]). In addition, it was only in April 2023 that the amendment to the Labour Code entered into force, obliging employers to negotiate with trade unions, if they are present in the company, on certain aspects of the organisation of remote work. Therefore, it is only in the coming time that provisions regarding remote/hybrid work should be expected to be included on a larger scale in internal company documents, such as collective agreements or employment regulations where there are no collective agreements in force.

3.2 Statutory legislation

Until the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, telework in Poland was regulated by the provisions of Chapter IIb entitled "Employing employees in the form of telework" of the Act of 26 June 1974 Labour Code (Journal of Laws 1974 No. 24 item 141, as amended). This chapter was introduced by the Act of 24 August 2007 amending the Labour Code and some other acts (Journal of Laws of 2007, No. 181, item 1288, as amended). Telework has been defined as "work performed regularly outside the work establishment, using means of electronic communication". The working time or proportions to work in the office were not specified. A number of detailed provisions were included regarding the obligations of both parties of the employment relationship and protecting teleworkers against discrimination. The most important of them were as follows:

- agreement on the performing work in the form of telework may take place when concluding an employment contract, as well as during employment,

- the employer is obliged, as far as possible, to take into account the request for telework of an employee taking care of a disabled child and women with a high-risk pregnancy, regarding the performance of work in the form of telework, unless it is impossible due to the organisation or nature of the work; the refusal should be justified in writing;
- the employment contract must specify the conditions under which telework is to be performed;
- within three months of teleworking being agreed upon, either party may make a binding request to stop teleworking; after this date, the employer should – as far as possible – consider such a request from the employee's side;
- the employee's resignation from telework or refusal to undertake it may not be the reason for termination of the employment contract by the employer;
- the teleworker must be informed to which organisational unit they belong, who is their superior and the person responsible for the control of their workplace,
- the employer must provide the employee with the equipment needed to perform the work, insure it, cover the costs of installation and servicing; the employee can provide the necessary equipment themselves, then they are entitled to a cash equivalent;
- the employer, after prior agreement with the employee and without violating their privacy, has the right to carry out inspections at the workplace regarding: performance of work, condition of entrusted equipment and compliance with occupational health and safety conditions;
- the teleworker must not be treated less favourably than other workers with regard to matters such as employment conditions, promotion or access to training; they, as well as a person who refused to perform work in the form of telework may not be discriminated against;
- the teleworker has the right to stay on the premises of the workplace, have access to the rooms and equipment of the employer and contact other employees.

In addition, the rules for teleworking in the company should be the subject of an agreement with trade union organisations or, in the event of failure to reach an agreement, be included in the work regulations, taking into account the arrangements that have been made with the trade unions.

It seems that the extensiveness and detail of the provisions discussed above is one of the reasons why employing teleworkers under this chapter of the Labour Code has never become popular in Poland. At the same time, the possibility of working partly from home was offered by more and more employers, based on the general provisions of the Labour Code, with not

taking into consideration the provisions on teleworking, and people performing ICT-based mobile work were sent to work outside the company's headquarters on the basis of a business trip. It should be noted that provisions addressing telework explicitly seemed to effectively protect teleworkers against discrimination and provided them with equal, safe working conditions:

- with regard to working time, ensured the application of strict provisions regulating working time in accordance with the Labour Code,
- provided health and safety control, with the employer being responsible for ensuring that all risks and hazards in the workplace are taken into account,
- ensured the possibility of controlling the employee by the superior, respecting the former's privacy,
- ensured that the teleworker was treated on an equal footing with other employees, including with regard to professional development.

At the same time, the lack of provisions regulating work performed partly from home created a kind of "grey zone" within which there were no regulations, for example, regarding the sphere of occupational health and safety and the employer's obligations regarding it.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has forced many employees to work from home. Temporary provisions were needed to allow employers to send employees to work from home. They were provided by the Act of 2 March 2020 on special solutions related to the prevention and combating of COVID-19 (Journal of Laws 2020, item 374, as amended) (colloquially known as the "anti-COVID act"). Article 3 of this legal act stated: "In order to counteract COVID-19, the employer may instruct the employee to perform, for a fixed period of time, work specified in the employment contract, outside the place of its permanent performance (remote work)." It was the only provision on this issue, and therefore temporary remote work during the pandemic was not regulated as to any significant issues arising from its performance. The obligations of both parties, anti-discrimination measures, obligations in the field of health and safety, professional development, control of employees by superiors, etc., were not specified.

Over time, the provisions of Article 3 were supplemented with, literally, several additional points, which stated, among other things, that "performing remote work may be recommended if the employee has the skills and technical and housing capabilities to perform such work and the type of work allows it". However, there was still a lack of permanent and adequately detailed regulations on remote work in Poland. Work on the amendment to the Labour Code

lasted over two years. Finally, the Sejm (the lower house of parliament) passed its draft in autumn 2022, and the new provisions entered into force on 7 April 2023. The validity of Article 3 of the "Anti-Covid Act" (still in force due to the state of epidemic threat maintained in Poland) has been repealed, as well as Chapter IIb of the Labour Code on the employment of teleworkers.

A new Chapter IIIb entitled "Remote Working" has been introduced, which is broadly based on the old Chapter IIb, but is even more extensive, providing some additional detailed provisions as well as different scenarios for the introduction of remote working. It can be both - as in the previous version of the regulations - the result of an agreement of both parties, as well as the employer's order in the event of a state of emergency, state of epidemic threat or state of epidemic and within 3 months after their cancellation, and also if the employer due to force majeure cannot provide safe and hygienic working conditions (and the employee declares that they have appropriate housing and technical conditions).

In addition to the anti-discrimination provisions and establishing the obligations of both parties being already in force, the following additional provisions were included, among others:

- the catalogue of employees for whom the employer is obliged, if possible, to consider the request for remote work, has been extended to include parents of children under 4 years of age, as well as persons caring for an adult disabled person;
- a list of eight issues was presented, which in particular should be agreed with the trade unions; these include, among others, the rules for calculating the cash equivalent paid to employees for the use of their own equipment or materials or the rules for conducting health and safety inspections;
- either party may submit a binding request to stop remote working at any time, also after three months from its agreement (this applies to the case of mutual agreement, not the employer's order based on an emergency situation);
- the employer is obliged to cover the costs of electricity and telecommunications to the employee;
- in the case of administrative and office positions, initial training in the field of health and safety can be conducted via electronic means of communication;
- the employer may prepare a universal occupational risk assessment for individual groups of remote work positions;

- when assessing the occupational risk of an employee performing work remote work, in particular, the impact of this work on vision, system is taken into account musculoskeletal and psychosocial conditions of this job;
- allowing the employee to perform remote work is subject to the submission of a declaration by him that safe and hygienic conditions for this work are provided at the remote work position.

To sum up, the new permanent provisions regulating remote work, which have just entered into force, are even broader and more detailed than the previous regulations on teleworking. Undoubtedly, it will be necessary to wait for the effects of their implementation, although they seem to ensure a high level of protection against discrimination of teleworkers and respecting the principles of occupational health and safety.

3.3 Collective regulation in the four sectors covered

As indicated above, as a rule, remote work has not been collectively regulated so far. Some agreement on the details of its implementation at the company level, due to the emergence of new regulations, may appear in the near future, which should be the subject of further field research.

The sectors included in the study differ as to the level of unionisation and the condition of social dialogue, including the scope of collective bargaining. A brief description of them is included below. As a general pattern, it should be indicated – unfortunately – that the higher the level of unionisation and the importance of collective bargaining in the sector, the lower the level of teleworkability and thus the potential interest in the issue of collective regulation of remote working by trade unions.

Chemical industry: a number of relatively strong trade unions are present, among which the most important nationwide organisations are the following:

- National Secretariat of the Chemical Industry of NSZZ "Solidarność" (KSPCh NSZZ "Solidarność")
- Federation of Chemical Industry Trade Unions (FZZPCh)
- Trade Union of Engineers and Technicians (ZZiT),
- National Association of Continuous Work Employees' Trade Unions (OZZZPRC).

On the side of entrepreneurs, there is the Polish Chamber of Chemical Industry (PIPC), formally not an employers' organisation.

There is no data on the coverage of collective bargaining agreements, although the analysis of the content of websites reveals that a number of them apply at the company level. The expected coverage of remote work by collective agreements is low because of its very limited scope due to the nature of the tasks in the sector. Work at the employer's premises dominates, and it is often continuous (shift) work. Remote/hybrid work may be applicable mainly to some administrative staff.

Financial sector: relatively strong nationwide trade unions are present in the sector:

- National Secretariat of Banks, Trade and Insurance of NSZZ "Solidarity",
- Confederation of Labour OPZZ.

Business is represented by the Polish Bank Association (ZBP) and the National Association of Cooperative Banks (KZBS), which are not formally employer organisations. Single-employer collective bargaining coverage is estimated in the range of 25-50% (Eurofound 2019a), unfortunately, the detailed content of these agreements is not available.

IT Sector: there is a lack of significant trade union organisations in the sector, despite attempts to establish them in individual companies in recent years, which have sometimes resulted in repression by employers (cf. e.g. Bankier 2022). It is even more difficult to imagine an effective attempt to negotiate a collective agreement in companies belonging to the industry (Eurofound estimates indicating 8% collective bargaining coverage surely concern the related telecommunications sector, cf. Eurofound 2019b). Undoubtedly, if agreements in the IT sector were to be concluded, the principles of remote working could be an important element of their content given the significant extent of teleworking in the sector.

Public administration: The following national unions are present in the sector:

- National Section of Government and Local Government Administration of NSZZ "Solidarność" (KSARiS NSZZ "Solidarność"),
- All-Poland Trade Union of National Treasury Administration (OZZKAS).

On the employers' side, on behalf of local government, there are:

- Union of Polish Counties,
- Association of Polish Towns,
- Union of Rural Communes of the Republic of Poland. None of them has the status of an employer organisation.

The practice of collective bargaining in this area does not exist.

4. Conclusions

The above analysis indicates that the use of remote working has been highly dynamic in recent years, and strongly stimulated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting restrictions. At the same time, it seems that the public statistics system to some extent fails to capture the actual scale of the use of off-site working, which - according to daily observation, but also to a number of qualitative studies – did not significantly decrease after the end of the pandemic. Hybrid working appears to be common in a number of sectors where the nature of the tasks allows them to be partly carried out from home.

The impact of remote working on the quality of workplaces is overwhelmingly positive, despite the potentially many risks to workers' psychological and physical well-being arising mainly from the careless implementation of this system of work. The ambiguous image of teleworking was also influenced by the unfavourable circumstances caused by the pandemic, intensifying feelings of isolation, weakened social ties, impaired communication with colleagues and superiors, and blurred boundaries between work and private life. On the other hand, many people prefer to work in the comfort of their own home, without having to waste time commuting and with a more flexible work schedule. At the same time, the impact of remote work on work-life balance in particular is ambiguous and varies depending on the circumstances, which in the above report was even referred to as the "work-life balance paradox", and undoubtedly requires further in-depth exploration.

Remote working is generally not regulated at company level through collective bargaining or other forms of social dialogue although new regulations should at least stimulate the negotiation of certain organisational details. At the same time, social partners are trying to influence the shape of legislation by giving their opinions on draft legal acts. The result of more than two years of work on a new law regulating remote working is an amendment to the Labour Code, which came into force in April 2023. The coming months will be a test of the effectiveness of the new solutions in terms of both the promotion of telework and ensuring fair and safe conditions for its operation at the enterprise level from the perspective of employees.

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