



Research Article

# Positives and Negatives of Home Working during the Covid-19 Pandemic from the Perspective of Employees in the Czech Republic

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Received date: 6 September 2022; Accepted date: 2 January 2023; Published date: 23 January 2023

Academic Editor: Sylwia Wiřniewska

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## Abstract

As a result of the Covid-19 viral disease pandemic, companies and their employees had to cope with a number of changes and people have faced new challenges, while working from home has become a pandemic phenomenon. The main aim of this article is to thoroughly analyse the experience and positive and negative aspects of home working during the pandemic in 2020 and 2021 in the Czech Republic from the employees' point of view. The partial goal is to find out how representatives of Generation Z perceive home working and process the results based on gender. The methodological procedure was that the secondary data were firstly obtained to meet the main objective by selection and content analysis of 475 quantitative and qualitative print and virtual sources published on the topic. Then an insight into these issues has been gained through survey, comparison and synthesis.

**Keywords:** home working, positives, negatives, Czech Republic.

## Introduction

The pandemic of the virus disease covid-19 caused by the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, which occurred the first time in the December of 2019 in the Chinese Wuhan, which has then spread all over the world, has turned into global economic

and social disruption. It has dramatically affected lives of people in the Czech Republic in private and work-related areas (ManpowerGroup, 2021). The year 2020 was full of challenges for many companies, and so has been the year 2021. The pandemic has taught everybody to adapt; it has changed the

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**Cite this Article as:** Petra Horvathova, Kateřina Mokra, Marie Mikuřova and Lucie Bestova (2023), "Positives and Negatives of Home Working during the Covid-19 Pandemic from the Perspective of Employees in the Czech Republic", *Journal of Human Resources Management Research*, Vol. 2023 (2023), Article ID 508077, DOI: 10.5171/2023.508077

settings of work and, in many cases, it has totally changed the company culture as well (HR Forum, 2021a). According to the research by the company ManpowerGroup Czech Republic under the name of "ManpowerGroup Index of the job market", the epidemic of covid-19 has negatively influenced the business of 57 % of Czech companies, from which 10 % had to be shut down completely. Thirty-five per cent of companies have not noticed any changes in business activities and 3 % have increased their business. In the international comparison, effects of the epidemic on companies in the Czech Republic are similar to, for example, Germany or Slovakia (EIPA, 2020; Deloitte, 2021; TřN, 2021). Czech data are not different from global average, where 63 % of the companies have stated negative effects of the pandemic on business (ManpowerGroup, 2021).

We can see acceleration of digitalisation in many areas as an effect of the coronavirus pandemic on the world of work and employees. There has been also a change of how people work, an effect on managing employees who have ended without personal contact with their subordinates from day to day, and people have re-evaluated their preferences in employee benefits. However, home working has become the phenomenon of the pandemic.

Work from home has been the number one HR topic of this period. Either if people want it and do not have it, or do not want it and experience it (Anguelov and Angelova, 2021). This has also been shown by the number of media posts about home working. Between the years 2019 and 2020 the number increased eight times (Hájková, 2021).

Even though there are many surveys which cover different kinds of impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on both Czech employers and employees, there are not, according to the authors and available facts, any data anywhere cumulatively presented, neither there are any conclusions made from them. This could help to better organize work from home in the future. Therefore, the aim of this article is to fill this research gap and to thoroughly analyse the experience and positive and negative aspects of home working in the period of the covid-19 pandemic in the years 2020 and 2021 from the employees' point of view in the Czech Republic. A partial goal is to find out what is the opinion about home working of representatives of Generation Z, this means the future employees

who will have experience with home working not as a benefit, but almost as a standard work mode in the future.

### Theoretical background

Work from home increased slowly in the decade before the Covid-19, although it was mostly occasional activity. Before the pandemic, only 5.4 % of the employed in the EU-27 usually worked from home – a share that remained rather constant since 2009 (Eurostat, 2021). In the conditions of the Czech Republic, it was around 4 % of employees (Kyzlinková et al., 2020). Work from home was considered as a form of employees' benefit (Dandová, 2021). The concept of home working begins to emerge with the coming of the Covid-19 pandemic and becomes an alternative strategy for many organizations all over the world (Mustajab et al., 2020), including the Czech Republic. Working from home now represents a crucial dimension of the future of work (Bai et al., 2020).

Home working brings positive effects to most employees and employers, these include the increase of employee work effort, self-leadership, engagement and well-being of employees by providing them with more autonomy (Bathini and Kandathil, 2019; Galanti et al., 2021; Nakrošienė et al., 2019; Wood et al., 2018; Rupieta Beckmann, 2018). Furthermore, based on many surveys, it is possible to state that if employees work from home there are other benefits, such as: flexibility and agility, improved employee retention, attracting new talent, convenience, increased productivity, increased employee motivation, freedom of work schedule, more time for and with family and more leisure time, improved efficiency, improved employee health and well-being, cost and time savings on commuting to work, better work-life balance, technology makes work easier, reduced absenteeism due to illness (Hylland and Prottas, 2017; Okuyan and Begen, 2021).

On the other hand, home working has a negative impact on employees and employers as well. Negative aspects of home working can be seen especially in social isolation, stress and work-family conflict (Galanti et al., 2021; Eng et al., 2010). Furthermore, based on many surveys, we can state that there are also other disadvantages to employees working from home, such as: home working does not suit everyone, difficulty in monitoring performance, home distractions, potential burnout, greater work-related fatigue, cost of working from home, problems with staff development, lack of working transparency,

difficulty in accessing relevant technology and important documents from home securely, difficulty in controlling the balance between work and life, information security risk, physical and emotional exhaustion, decreased staff morale, not all jobs suit home working etc. (Galanti et al., 2021; Palumbo, 2020; Okuyan and Begen, 2021; Vione and Kotera, 2021).

Minimizing the negative effects of home working and creating solutions to decrease negative factors associated with the disadvantages of working from home are critical for maintaining the productivity and well-being of individuals at all times but especially during the Covid-19 pandemic (Okuyan and Begen, 2021). A shift towards home working does not mean that employees have to work only from home. Often splitting time between home and the workplace is the most productive solution and you may want the worker to attend meetings to keep them fully involved and informed (Businessinfo, 2021).

The pandemic forced many professionals to work from home. Companies shifted to hybrid work arrangements; they reconsidered the size, location, and design of offices (Szumilo and Wiegelmann, 2021). The October 2020 Fortune/Deloitte CEO Survey found that 76 % of CEOs indicated that their organizations would need less space moving forward. This could lead to significant savings in operating costs and capital expenditure. Real estate and facilities are often one of the top three expenditures of an organisation; typically, they can represent between 2 % and 5 % of the organisation's revenue (Griffin and Asker, 2021). Research shows that co-working will likely experience a surge in popularity.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we are seeing a lot of changes in strategy and employee expectations; in Aon's 2021 UK Benefits and Trends Survey, 79 % of the companies responded that they believed they would need to change their benefits to meet the needs of their employees (Aon, 2021). Research by the global insurance brokerage and advisory firm Willis Towers Watson in the UK found that 42 % of the companies made changes to their benefits' programs due to the pandemic. We can say that Covid-19 did not eliminate any needs for benefits, and for many people, it created some new ones (Rappaport, 2020).

### Research objective, methodology and data

The main aim of this article is to summarize the experience and positive and negative aspects of home working during the pandemic in 2020 and 2021 in the Czech Republic from the employees' point of view.

In the first phase of work in July 2021, 87 suitable printed articles (often available in electronic form) were selected and 365 virtual retrospective quantitative and qualitative articles on the impact of the pandemic on the world of work and employees in the Czech Republic were selected.

Because these findings covered the situation in the Czech Republic, the authors of approximately 75 % of the printed articles in the Czech language were local experts in the given field – personalists, economists, analysts of management, directors, owners and managers of companies and recruitment consulting agencies, for example Hájková, A., Očenášková, A., Černošlávková, L., Housková, S., Kazdová, A., Kvapil, K., Hovorková, L., Jarošová, B., Reiner, T., Stegura, T. and others. These authors publish in the Czech important specialised magazines which cover given problematics (for example Profi HR, HR Forum, Personál, Ekonom, Praktická personalistka and so on). Furthermore, to show the whole surveyed area and for the possibility of comparison of the situation in the Czech Republic with foreign countries, around 25 % of printed articles in English were found (using keywords related to the topic such as remote, work, home, Covid-19, impacts, positives, negatives and so on and their combination) in the databases of Web of Science and Scopus. These were articles published in renowned magazines such as Journal of Applied Psychology (Dutch authors Stollberger, J. et al.), International Journal of Manpower (Israeli author Nadiv, R.), Journal of Corporate Real Estate (American authors Eunhwa, Y. et al.), Frontiers of Psychology (Swiss authors Zurcher, A. et al.), Stress and Health (Dutch authors Darouei, M. and Pluut, H.), Journal of Labour Market Research (Norwegian authors Holgersen, H. et al.), Technology in Society (Macedonian authors Prodanova, J. and Kocarev, L.), Gender, Work and Organization (British authors Antonacopoulou E. P. and Georgiadou A.) and others.

Digital articles covering the problematics of remote work were filtered (using the same keywords) through Google in the following

structure: 20 % of articles written in Czech and 80 % of articles written in English. These were articles written by Czech authors (for example Drahošová, B., Vacková, H., Verner, I., Klímová, Z. and others), as well as by foreign specialists in the given field (for example British author Cook, J., French author Laljee, J., American author Zeidner, R., Australian author Dalzell, S., British author Partridge, J. and others) who publish on specialized websites and platforms and news servers.

Furthermore 23 printed and virtual research papers provided for example by the Czech Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Czech and foreign analytical and consulting and recruitment agencies, or other subjects, (McKinsey & Company, OECD, Grafton Recruitment, Deloitte, ManpowerGroup, Gallup, AON, Pew Research Center, Global Workplace Analytics and others) were found published in the same period covering the topic of working from home. Thus, a total of 475 print and virtual sources were used. Printed and virtual articles were published in the second part of 2020 and the first half of 2021. The reference list shows only those sources which represent the content of all sources used for processing of the study.

All these articles and research papers were subjected to the content analysis in order to prepare the state-of-the-art report, i.e., through descriptive research, secondary data for the next phases of the work were obtained in July 2021. Search, comparison and synthesis in August 2021 provided an insight into the experience and positive and negative aspects of home working, which have been brought by the switch to this work form in the Czech Republic, from the employees' point of view. Based on the main objective stated above, the first research question was formulated: **Q1:** What do the employees in the Czech Republic consider as the main positive and negative aspects of home working? Then, based on accomplishing the main goal with the use of induction, deduction and personal experience of the authors, recommendations for the future use of home working not only for the Czech economy, but also for similar economies, were discussed.

With the aim of completing the partial goal, the respondents were asked in June 2021 to find out opinions about home working among the representatives of Generation Z. The question was: What negative and positive aspects do you perceive as the result of home working, from the employees' points of view? Further two questions were asked based on the above-mentioned set partial goal: **Q2:** Does Generation Z perceive positive and negative aspects of

home working from the employees' point of view in the same way as employees who worked from home for a year during the pandemic, and is the perception the same if we also consider gender? **Q3:** If there are any differences in perception of home working from the employees' point of view of Generation Z and those employees who worked from home for a year during the pandemic, what differences are there and do these differ if we also consider gender? The basic and at the same time sample number (100 % return was reached) of respondents consisted of 172 students (110 women and 62 men) studying 2nd year of bachelor's degree programs focused on economics and management and marketing and trade at the Faculty of Economics at one of the state universities in the Czech Republic. The respondents were answering in a written free form of text; they could provide more positive and negative aspects of home working from the employee's point of view. The evaluation of answers was done by using the method of content analysis and descriptive statistics with the second-level classification based on gender. No other statistical methods or analyses were used because of the above-mentioned partial goal.

## Results

According to existing research, those who had experience with home working consider as **positive aspects** the possibility to manage their time according to themselves (68 %), time saving (e.g., commuting, make up etc., 64 %), money saving (e.g., lunches, commuting, 30 %), positive influence on the feeling of independence (59 %), possibility to take care of household during work (63 %), or the possibility to have more time for family (33 %) (Hájková, 2021; Očenášková, 2021a). It is also possible to see the fact that many employees have used the pandemic as a time for personal growth, as was published in last year's research of the ABSL association, which associates business service centres. Sixty per cent of centres registered growth in online education, 66 % of employees improved in soft skills, 41 % aimed at obtaining new competencies and 33 % took part in online language courses (Profi HR, 2020b). When it comes to productivity, according to the research done by the Institute of Technology and Business in České Budějovice, 51 % of the employees are more productive when working from home, 36 % can do the same amount of work, only 13 % of them are less productive at home. Higher productivity is increased by the fact that employees do not have

to commute to work, are not distracted by their colleagues and are able to plan their work more efficiently (Novinky.cz, 2021). For example, the research by the company LMC shows that 60 % of the managers reported that during the spring and autumn wave of coronavirus, home working had surprisingly high results; even managers who did not want work from home and did not trust it found out that people working from home worked with the same or even higher efficiency (Černohlávková and Housková, 2021).

Employees working from home have stated in research that **negative aspects** are missing colleagues (37 %), bad communication with colleagues (31 %), lack of necessary tools for work (28 %), troubles with time management (23 %) or disturbing and distraction by children (14 %) (Hájková, 2021; Langvik et al., 2021). People also see a thin line between work and private life and feel a social distance. They suffer from the feeling of loneliness; they experience lack of trust from the side of micromanagers; they perceive worse flow of information and that they do not have such insight into the activities within the company. The willingness to cooperate is also decreasing, and the possibility of socialisation is missing, clearly given structure of task and regular rituals related to workdays are missing (Novinky.cz, 2021; Očenášková, 2021b; Kvapil, 2021). During total or long-term home working compared to partial home working, the employees have been negatively evaluating the effects on relationships with colleagues and relationships with their superiors and on the feeling of connection with the company (Očenášková, 2021b), more so, according to the analysis by the companies ApuTime and DAP Service also decrease in motivation (IDnes.cz, 2021). According to this analysis, during long-term home working, the inner motivation for work has dropped in comparison to the year 2019 by 6.5 % (some companies have minimal decrease, some have decrease in tens of percent) (IDnes.cz, 2021). Research by the SC&C agency for company System4u presents that home working does not suit every other person, it means that more than a half of employees find home working difficult or even exceedingly difficult. They are bothered mainly by the complicated contact with colleagues (42 %), it means difficult communication with them via phone or email; they miss common direct contact, which they were used to earlier; they

feel the absence of full-fledged access to company applications (every eighth); instability of connection and limited user rights are also a huge problem; they are bothered by complicated and non-functioning connection to company internal network (every sixth); one tenth of employees is unsatisfied with insufficient equipment which they have to work with (Buřínková, 2021). This is also confirmed by the research by the communication agency AMI Communications, according to which the present situation has influenced relationships among colleagues at 48 % of the respondents; every eighth employee views the situation in the group rather as worsening and this is also for example due to cooling of relationships and envy of working conditions among colleagues; 34 % of the respondents have changed their relationship towards their employer, either positively or negatively (Profi HR, 2020a). According to the research by Survio which was conducted in the spring of 2021, long term work from home is damaging to junior employees, those who need to be close to their experienced mentors (Kvapil, 2021). The pandemic negatively influenced physical and mental health of people working from home (Okuyan and Begen, 2021). According to the research of the company MultiSport, only one fifth of people did sport with the same intensity during the pandemic as before it; each third person had not done any physical activity even once a week, but for example only once every two weeks, or even once a month (HR Forum, 2021b).

Because none, with one exception, of cited surveys dealt with the processing of results based on identification signs (age and gender) of the respondents, and because the authors of this article are in daily contact with young people, future employees, representatives of Generation Z, the authors set a partial goal of the article to find out what was the opinion of representatives of Generation Z about home working. Generation Z is a generation which will enter the work market in near future and the employers should know the opinion of these young people about many kinds of work-related matters, including home working, in a way that could help them balance their ideas and also use the strengths of this generation for successful reaching of targets of their companies and maintain their competitiveness.

The respondents (172 students, 110 women and 62 men), representatives of Generation Z, answered the above-mentioned question in the form of free writing; they could state more positive and negative aspects from the employee's point of view. The authors obtained

detailed results based on the evaluation of answers. These results show what Generation Z sees as positive and negative aspects from the employees' point of view. These results are presented in Tab. 1.

**Tab. 1: Positive and negative aspects of home working from the employees' point of view**

Positive aspects	Total	Men	Women
Time saving	79 (45.9 %)	31 (50 %)	48 (43.6 %)
Cost saving	56 (32.6 %)	24 (38.7 %)	32 (29.1 %)
Growth of self-reliance, responsibility, and efficiency	41 (23.8 %)	28 (45.2 %)	13 (11.8 %)
Flexibility	41 (23.8 %)	5 (8.1 %)	36 (32.7 %)
No need to care about appearance	23 (13.4 %)	8 (12.9 %)	15 (13.6 %)
Less stress	21 (12.2 %)	11 (17.7 %)	10 (9.1 %)
Higher productivity	15 (8.7 %)	9 (14.5 %)	6 (5.5 %)
Skills development	10 (5.8 %)	2 (3.2 %)	8 (7.3 %)
Prevention of workplace-related conflicts	8 (4.7 %)	6 (9.7 %)	2 (1.8 %)
Negative aspects	Total	Men	Women
Missing personal contact	97 (56.4 %)	38 (61.3 %)	59 (53.6 %)
Worse work ethic, motivation, lower efficiency	75 (43.6 %)	29 (46.8 %)	46 (41.8 %)
Disturbance by other members of the household	35 (20.3 %)	12 (19.4 %)	23 (20.9 %)
More time spent working	27 (15.7 %)	6 (9.7 %)	21 (19.1 %)
Health issues	12 (7 %)	4 (6.5 %)	8 (7.3 %)
Connectivity issues	9 (5.2 %)	5 (8.1 %)	4 (3.6 %)
Impossibility to use employee's benefits	9 (5.2 %)	3 (4.8 %)	6 (5.5 %)
Increased household costs	8 (4.7 %)	4 (6.5 %)	4 (3.6 %)
Feeling to be constantly online	8 (4.7 %)	2 (3.2 %)	6 (5.5 %)

Source: Authors' own research

## Discussion and conclusion

Based on research, comparison and synthesis of the above-mentioned stated results of surveys, it is possible to answer the first question **Q1**: What do the employees in the Czech Republic consider as the main positive and negative aspects of home working? like this - the employees see as the main positive aspects of home working the possibility to manage their time according to themselves, saving time, saving money, a positive effect on their feeling of independence, possibility to take care of household during work, possibility to have more time for family, personal growth, productivity growth, no distraction by their colleagues, better work planning. The employees see as the main negative aspects missing colleagues, bad communication with colleagues, lack of necessary tools for work, troubles with time

management, disturbing and distraction by children, feeling of a thin line between work and private life, feeling of social distance, feeling of loneliness, lack of trust from the side of micromanagers, worse flow of information, not such insight into the activities within the company, lower willingness to cooperate, poorer relationships with colleagues and supervisors, decrease in motivation, no full-fledged access to company applications, instability of connection and limited user rights and negative influence on their physical health and mental problems as well.

In comparison with positive and negative aspects of home working identified by various global surveys in similar economies as for example Slovakia, Germany or Poland, we can see that the positive and negative aspects of home working in these states are very similar to

the ones in the Czech Republic (EIPA 2020; Deloitte, 2021). The paper dealt with how the pandemic of virus disease Covid-19 caused by the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 has affected employees in the Czech Republic.

Based upon the evaluation of respondents' answers, it is also possible to affirmatively answer the question **Q2**: Does Generation Z perceive positive and negative aspects of home working from the employees' point of view in the same way as employees who worked from home for a year during the pandemic, and is the perception the same if we also consider gender? Meaning that Generation Z perceives positive and negative aspects of home working from the employees' point of view in the same way as the employees who worked for the whole year from home during the pandemic (results of all above-mentioned surveys). There are some differences in perception of positive and negative aspects of home working according to gender.

Based upon the evaluation of respondents' answers, it is also possible to answer the third question **Q3**: If there are any differences in perception of home working from the employees' point of view of Generation Z and those employees who worked from home for a year during the pandemic, what differences are there and do these differ if we also consider gender? There are some differences, these perceptions also differ according to gender. In comparison with the results of all the above-mentioned surveys, respondents mentioned the prevention of workplace related conflicts as another positive from the employee's point of view; in the case of negatives, they also mentioned the impossibility to use employee benefits and increased household costs. In addition, respondents mentioned the possibility of attracting qualified professionals from abroad as another positive from the employer's point of view and refusing contact with their supervisor as another negative. All these positive and negative aspects were not mentioned by a larger number of respondents, these were minor further opinions referring to the above-mentioned surveys.

The paper dealt with how the pandemic of virus disease covid-19 caused by the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 has affected employees in the Czech Republic.

The methodology of this paper is based on positive-objective approach, where the examination of 475 quantitative and qualitative printed and virtual articles published on the topic of effects of the pandemic on the world of work and employees in the Czech Republic is used as the main method. Evaluation of answers was done by using the method of content analysis and descriptive statistics with second-level classification based on gender.

Home working was studied in detail as a phenomenon of the pandemic situation. The identification of the positive and negative aspects of this situation from the point of view of employees in the Czech Republic was based on many surveys. The authors also found out the opinions of Generation Z representatives regarding the positive and negative aspects of home working.

A limitation of the overview study may be the fact that even with the maximum effort of the authors to catch all available information on this given topic, with regards to the number of published articles this did not have to be fully successful. Partially limiting is also the fact that the article is focused only on the Czech Republic. However, based on studied and processed publications, it is possible to claim that, besides partial differences, e. g. in the approach to productivity control, the Czech Republic and other comparable states do not differ much. Another partial limitation can be the fact that the analysis of the secondary data was used. This means that the authors did not have control over conceptualisation of research and data collecting. On the other hand, the use of secondary data brought simplification of the realisation of the study and saving of time and financial resources.

The future direction of this researched area is viewed by the authors in the possibility to focus on the survey of positive and negative aspects of home working from the employers' point of view, which may bring further beneficial opinions about the future form of home working.

### **Acknowledgements**

This article was created within the project of the Student Grant Competition SP 2022/93 entitled „The impact of remote working on

organizational culture and its association with other aspects of work in the context of a pandemic situation”.

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