

Czech University of Life Sciences Prague

Faculty of Economics and Management

Department of Economics



Bachelor Thesis

**The psychological influence of distance work on employees
in business**

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BACHELOR THESIS ASSIGNMENT

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Economics Policy and Administration
Business Administration

Thesis title

Psychological influence of distance work on employees in business

Objectives of thesis

- Identify how people feel working from home
- Analyze what people like and dislike in distance work
- Explore opinions of experts about distance work

Methodology

- Modeling
- Analogy
- Classification
- Observation

The main method of my research is a qualitative research with additional analytic evaluation of interviews' results. In order to find real consequences behind the phenomenon, I will be conducting a series of inter-personal interview with participants working in a corporate environment for n period of time. Afterwards, the evaluation of results and drawing the primary repercussions will be delivered by me based on my knowledge of psychological terms and definitions, as well as application.

The proposed extent of the thesis

40 p.

Keywords

- Influence on employee -Distance work – Working conditions

Recommended information sources

ARNOLD, J. – RANDALL, R. *Work psychology : understanding human behaviour in the workplace*. New York: Pearson Education, 2016. ISBN 9781292063409.

Chen, H, Li, S (2017) Measuring the psychological distance between an organization and its members—The construction and validation of a new scale. *Frontiers in Psychology* 8: 2296.

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Wade, J. (2011) 'The Risks of Working from Home'. *Risk Management, New York*, (58.9): pp.14-15.

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Declaration

I declare that I have worked on my bachelor thesis titled " The psychological influence of distance work on employees in business." by myself and I have used only the sources mentioned at the end of the thesis. As the author of the bachelor thesis, I declare that the thesis does not break any copyrights.

In Prague on 29.11.2021

_____ Elena Iakovleva _____

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The psychological influence of distance work on employees in business.

Abstract.

This work is devoted to the consideration of the theoretical and practical aspects of the impact of distance work on the human psyche. The author analyzes the existing scientific research in this area, gives his own arguments and fabrications in relation to the topic concerned. The author comes to the conclusion that the role of distance work in influencing the human psyche cannot be considered as purely negative; on the contrary, remote work can and should be implemented in practice, since it allows a person to work in the most comfortable conditions for him, taking into account a flexible working time. This allows the distance-work employee to spend more time with family members, provides ample opportunities for self-development and self-study. Thus, distance work is an excellent tool for creating psychological harmony in a person's life.

Keywords: Distance work, loneliness, professional burnout, digitalization, COVID-19, employee psychology, isolation.

Psychologický vliv práce z domova na zaměstnance v podnikání.

Abstract

Tato práce je věnována problémům teoretických a praktických aspektů vlivu distanční práce na psychologii osobnosti. Autor zkoumá aktuální vědecký výzkum v této oblasti, prezentuje vlastní argumenty a výsledky týkající tuto oblast. Autor dochází k závěru, že vliv distanční práce na lidskou psychiku nemůže být považován jenom za negativní; naopak, práce z domova může a měla by být v praxi zavedena, kvůli tomu, že umožňuje člověku pracovat v jiných okolnostech s přihlédnutím k flexibilní pracovní době. To umožňuje zaměstnanci pracující z domova trávit více času s rodinou, poskytuje dostatek možností pro osobní rozvoj a samostudium. Práce z domova je tedy výborným nástrojem pro vytváření psychické harmonie v životě člověka.

Klíčová slova: Distanční práce, osamělost, profesionální vyhoření, digitalizace, COVID=19, organizační psychologie, izolace

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Introduction.

This work is devoted to the consideration of the most important aspects of the psychological impact of remote work on employees in business. This problem is the subject of extensive discussions among representatives of the scientific community, and is, in connection with the comparative novelty of the phenomenon itself, of significant scientific interest. In connection with the prolonged COVID-19 pandemic. This study uses the positions of scientists in the field of psychology contained in scientific articles and publications, as well as the recommendations of long-term company leaders and individuals with experience of distance work.

The global goal of preserving and protecting the mental health of workers can only be achieved through the application of comprehensive measures both at the state level and at the level of individual companies, as well as work managers and employees themselves. These measures can be of a purely organizational and technical nature, as well as a creative nature, which characterizes the latest practices of the world's leading companies in organizing remote work, protecting the rights and interests of employees in all aspects of distance work.

The author acknowledges that distance work can be associated with significant emotional and psychological stress for the employee, since it entails a radical change in the usual way of life. However, the author believes that the negative aspects of this phenomenon can be leveled out if you adhere to certain rules for organizing the workflow, by streamlining the work schedule, minimizing distractions, creating objective conditions for achieving a given result with minimal time and mental costs. Accordingly, in the beginning, the author proposes to consider general theoretical and professional positions, and recommendations regarding the conditions for organizing a workplace, work schedule, a system of communication with work managers and colleagues, and other factors affecting the psychological state of distance work, and then analyze the results of independent research the author, conducted by interviewing a group of distance-work employee, in order to form final conclusions on a given problem, and give recommendations that have real practical significance in the context of the goals and objectives of this work.

1. Objectives and methodology of work

1.1 Objectives.

One of the main tasks of the work is to find those factors and conditions that can determine the negative psychological impact of remote work on company employees. So, it is necessary to identify the interdependence between the typical features of telecommuting and those psychological problems that usually arise in remote employees, to outline the conditions under which these features will have a negative effect and, on the contrary, ways to use these features in a positive way. Further, the author should conduct a practical research on the topic of this work among a group of distance-work employees, and, based on theoretical developments and the above-mentioned research, formulate universal recommendations for eliminating the negative psychological effect of distance work, as a result of which general conclusions will be drawn regarding the benefits or harms of teleworking in psychological aspect.

1.2. Methodology.

In this work, the author will use the following general scientific research methods:

1) Induction. From the particular facts reflecting the attitude of individuals to remote work, the author will single out the general rules that underlie these facts and, thus, under general equal conditions, are applicable to all situations similar in circumstances.

2) Deduction. From the general conclusions that follow from the laws of logic and generally recognized laws of psychology, the author draws conclusions that are applicable to particular situations characteristic of distance work.

3) Analysis. By isolating the characteristic properties and features of such a phenomenon as remote work, the author will analyze the role of each particular in the process of psychological influence on employees in business (digitalization factor, distraction factor, junk food factor, sedentary factor etc.).

4) Synthesis. As part of this method, the author will combine the previously identified parts into a single whole, in order to understand their complex impact on the psychology of a remote employee

5) Interview. Using this research method, the author will find out the opinion of persons with remote work experience in order to use it to develop recommendations for improving the distance work process.

The peculiarities of the research in terms of the methods used by the author consist in the need to cross-use the entire volume of methodological tools in the implementation of the practical part of the work. Thus, the position of an individual employee, with regard to the peculiarities of the psychological impact of remote work, cannot be used as the basis for the conclusions reached by the author within the framework of this work, without a complex and comprehensive study of the conditions of remote work in the company, the living conditions and previous experience of the employee, as well as other factors that can have a significant impact on the subjective point of view of the employee on the phenomena and processes that are the subject of research within the framework of this work. It should be noted that despite the fact that remote work has been widely introduced into the practice of implementing business processes since the very beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, that is, for almost two years now, there are no comprehensive generalized data in scientific sources to date, in general, there are no comprehensive generalized data taking into account the peculiarities of various professions, branches of the market economy and legislative regulation, in relation to statistical data on the psychological impact of remote work on employees in business. In view of the stated facts, the author relies more on empirical material, presented by those perceptions, feelings, emotions and ideas that come from persons who took part in the study during interviews (surveys). Since the material coming from a particular subject has a high degree of emotional coloring and expressiveness, the author is forced to make an amendment to the "subjective" factor, which is expressed in embellishing (exaggerating) some factors that have significant psychological significance for the respondent, and downplaying the significance of other circumstances, for one reason or another, not mentioned by the respondent, or mentioned in passing. To ensure the objectivity of the study, the author, when forming the final conclusions and suggestions, has to make an amendment to the high degree of subjectivity of the source material, which entails the need for a comprehensive analysis and consideration of all the circumstances and conditions that affected the emotional component of the respondent's response.

Theoretical part.

2.1 Sources of the problem: distance work as a possible catalyst for psychological difficulties on employees in business.

Remote work is not a new phenomenon in the modern model of organizing the work of employees in business. However, it was with the beginning of the large-scale spread of the COVID-19 pandemic that distance work became a daily routine in almost all areas of professional activity that do not require direct physical impact of a person on a particular object in the process of performing work. Lawyers, educators, IT workers, managers, economists, design engineers, a number of bank employees, as well as a significant portion of government employees - this is a partial list of those who have faced to distance work in the past two years.

It is well known that the most important element of human psychology, which forms the way of life of both an individual and entire communities, is habit, or, as this phenomenon is called in the science of psychology, "addiction". Compliance with a daily ritual, a sequence of actions, is a significant psychological component of any person's activity. As Charles Duhigg notes in this regard «habits emerge because the brain is constantly looking for ways to save effort. Left to its own devices, the brain will try to make almost any routine into a habit, because habits allow our minds to ramp down more often... Without habit loops, our brains would shut down, overwhelmed by the minutiae of daily life»¹. Most of us are inscribed in the usual algorithm of life «home - work (office) - home», although, of course, this general algorithm can be «diluted» with various kinds of particulars («walks», «fitness», «bars», «travel»). Distance work breaks the specified algorithm, merging into a single whole the concepts of «home» and «work». And it is in this that the «little devil» is hidden, striking a blow to the psychology of the newly appeared remote employee. However, first things first.

From the title of this section, it is clear that the author believes that distance work in some cases can act as a catalyst for psychological problems in an employee. However, before giving arguments in favor of the position, you should define the concepts. So what exactly are mental health and psychological problems?

Mental health is defined as «a level of wellbeing in which the individual is able to recognize his or her abilities and to handle the regular stresses of life. Moreover, the individual

¹ Duhigg, C. The power of habit. Why we do what we do and how to change it. 2012. pp. 17-18.

can conduct work in a productive manner and contribute to the community. If this state of wellbeing is not reached, this is defined as a mental disorder»².

In the scientific literature, the psychological problem is defined as «any life situation or task (present or anticipated) that demands a response for adaptive functioning but no effective response is immediately apparent or available to the person or people confronted with the situation because of the presence of one or more obstacles»³. In a general sense, a symptom of a psychological problem is the presence of some kind of «harmful or anxiety state»⁴.

How does remote work affect the formation of a «harmful or alarming» psychological state of a person?

«According to the Eurofound survey launched on 9 April 2020, 18 per cent of EU respondents said they felt particularly tense most of the time over the past two weeks – this contrasts with just 11 per cent in the 2016 survey (Eurofound, 2020b)»⁵.

According to research published in the medical journal «The Lancet», people quarantined during the pandemic experienced: depression, stress, depressed mood, irritability, insomnia, symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, anger, and emotional exhaustion. At the same time, depressed mood and irritability were observed especially often⁶.

The most important thing to understand is that distance work is not just an alternative way of distributing and organizing working time, it is a completely different way of organizing life. Thus, choosing a remote job, a person should be aware that he is fundamentally changing his life. However, these changes are not as straightforward as it might seem at first sight. «Unlike what you might see on Instagram, working remotely doesn't mean you jet set to exotic locations to drink piña coladas on the beach»⁷. Remote work actually levels the line between the usual office, where a person should devote himself to work in order to feed himself and his family, and at home, where the same person, being a good family man, should be engaged in family, and family leisure. Thus, the impact of telecommuting is much more global, as it is not just about changing the work environment and environment but eliminating the concept of

² José Manuel Cotilla Conceição, Fritz, T. Mental Health of Remote Working Employees in Europe. 2021. p. 1.

³ D'Zurilla, T. J., Nezu, A. M., & Maydeu-Olivares, A. Social problem solving: theory and assessment. 2004. pp. 11-27.

⁴ Smedslund, J. The logic of psychological treatment. Scandinavian Journal of Psychology. 1981. p. 22.

⁵ International Labour Organization (ILO): Practical Guide on Teleworking during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. Available at: https://www.ilo.org/travail/info/publications/WCMS_751232/lang--en/index.htm. As of 20.07.2021.

⁶ Brooks, S.K., Webster, R.K., Smith, L.E., Woodland, L., Wessely, S., Greenberg, N., Rubin, G.J. The psychological impact of quarantine and how to reduce it: rapid review of the evidence. 2020. Lancet. p. 913.

⁷ State of remote work 2019: A report by Buffer in partnership with Doist, Hubstaff, Remote-How, RemoteYear, Trello, Workfrom, and We Work Remotely. Available at: <https://buffer.com/state-of-remote-work-2019>. As of 20.07.2021.

«working hours». Paradoxically, the remote worker does not work, he performs the task. In this regard, the work process itself (including difficulties in finding the necessary information, difficulties in processing a document, etc.) practically does not matter, since the head of the remote employee to a much lesser extent than in the case of an office employee, can understand the actual component of the work process itself. «I don't have access to the information I need; I cannot formulate a thought; the counterparty does not answer calls» - all these reasons for not reaching the result by the deadline can explain cognitive helplessness of the employee if he is in the office (with physical contact with the manager), but they are extremely weak as an excuse for disrupting the plan, in the case of remote work.

Another important factor of distance work is a significant reduction in the circle of communication. Working in an office is not only a long commute to work during rush hour in the subway or by car, it is not only 8 hours of work behind a computer screen and a daily routine. Office work is also about communicating with people, and the social circle, of course, varies from the field of work, but in any case, it remains quite wide.

Loneliness was a massive problem even before the COVID-19 pandemic began. So, according to research conducted by the medical and insurance company Cigna in January 2020, «three out of every five adults, or 61%, report that they sometimes or always feel lonely, according to the Cigna U.S. Loneliness Index»⁸. With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, loneliness has become an even more significant problem, significantly affecting the psychological well-being of distance employee.

Remote work can have a twofold effect on a person's physical health. On the one hand, the undoubted advantage of remote work is that there is no need to spend time on the road to the office, and the ability to use this time for morning jogging, exercise, walking the dog. There may be many ideas for using this free time. Unfortunately, their actual implementation is usually reduced to sound sleep until the last minute before the start of the «remote work day». No matter how we deny this fact, however, most of us (with rare exceptions) will not find in ourselves the desire to do what, in the absence of habit and effort on ourselves, is difficult and unpleasant for us (the morning walk or jog already mentioned above). Contrariwise, we will blissfully surrender to the power of what is pleasant and easy for us (dream). So, having woken up 5 minutes before the start of the working day, the person, having washed and hastily put himself in order, sits down at the monitor and ... realizes that he did not have breakfast! He

⁸ Coombs, B. Loneliness is on the rise and younger workers and social media users feel it most, Cigna survey finds. Available at: <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/01/23/loneliness-is-rising-younger-workers-and-social-media-users-feel-it-most.html>. As of 20.07.2021.

doesn't have time to make himself a full breakfast, so he eats yesterday's sandwiches, or orders fast food delivery. A similar situation takes place at lunchtime. Thus, meals are reduced to the use of unhealthy food and sweets, which, in the absence of the necessary physical exercise and exertion, after a short time leads to obesity, problems with the gastrointestinal tract, pain in the legs and other very unpleasant physical problems, which is inevitably the most negatively affects the psychological health of the teleworker. «Home working theoretically provides opportunities for healthy eating and more exercise. However, so far, more people have tended to eat unhealthy food, exercise less and gain weight, causing less satisfaction and wellbeing»⁹.

«Fat, sad, alone with a computer — this is about how the remote work goes» - this is how one of the users of the IT forum habr.com described remote work¹⁰.

Relationships with family members may also be at risk. The temptation to shift some of the cases to a «freelancer relative staring at the computer» will be too great, so a remote worker should be prepared for the fact that he will have to explain to his family with foam at the mouth that he is doing the same work as in the office, and this chair and table are his workplace.

In general, the psychological difficulties of distance work are reduced to the following groups:

- 1) Difficulties in relation to the organization of the work process itself;
- 2) Difficulties of self-organization and difficulties arising from the social nature of man;
- 3) Difficulties in relationships with family and friends.

So, summarizing this paragraph: why can remote work be considered as a catalyst for psychological difficulties among employees in business? As we have learned, remote work does not just change the way the workspace, working time and workflow are organized (although this is also the case), but it cardinally affects the organization of all human life. As the Russian existentialist philosopher Lev Isaakovich Shestov rightly noted, «a person is such a conservative being that every change, even a change for the better, scares him, and he usually prefers the familiar, even the bad, the old to the new, even the good»¹¹. Such a significant change in lifestyle for a person is, therefore, the strongest stress, which is often extremely

⁹ We're All in the Same Storm, Not the Same Boat! The Psychological Effects of Working from Home. Available at: <https://adapt-global.com/psychological-effects-of-home-working/>. As of 20.07.2021.

¹⁰ Psychology of a remote work: how not to go off the rails (in Russian). Available at: <https://habr.com/ru/company/regionsoft/blog/512694/>. As of 20.07.2021.

¹¹ Shestov, L.I. All Things are Possible (Apotheosis of Groundlessness). 2009. p. 125.

difficult to successfully cope with. In addition, remote work, due to the peculiarities of its organization, can lead to feelings of loneliness and frustration, a feeling of «lagging behind in the level of knowledge from office colleagues», the appearance of bad habits, difficulties in self-organization, the appearance of a sense of «attachment to one place», increased professional burnout. The content of these problems and the ways to overcome them will be considered in the following paragraphs of this work.

2.2. Remote work: pros and cons in the context of modern psychology

Like any social phenomenon, remote work has its pros and cons, which can have a direct impact on the psychological state of the individual. Let's start with the pros.

1) Ability to work anytime, anywhere, or, to put it simply, the flexibility to work remotely. This parameter is, perhaps, the most significant advantage of remote work. As Vice President of 10UP Chris Wallace notes in this regard, «the best part about working remotely is that you get to work from anywhere... Having the flexibility to work where you want means you can both create the ideal workspace for yourself while also having the option of attending events or traveling to various meetings on your schedule... And it's not just flexibility in where you work, but also when you work»¹². However, it should be borne in mind that this advantage in some states may be nullified by the terms of an employment contract, which may provide for a certain working time regime, by analogy with traditional office work (for example, such a condition of an employment contract is allowed by the legislation of the Russian Federation). The free schedule of a distance work employee is conditional also because restrictions in the choice of place and time of work can be dictated by living conditions, as well as by the needs of family members (for example, young parents who are unable to hire a nanny are forced to adjust their schedule in order to raise a child; a person living in an industrial area is unlikely to travel to the other side of the city to the park to work with a laptop, etc.). Thus, with some caveats, telecommuting is indeed a much more flexible option for organizing working hours, compared to working in an office. This allows a person to allocate time according to their own needs and interests, which helps to avoid stressful situations and improves the psychological climate in relationships with family.

¹² Wallace, C. The pros and cons of working remotely. Available at: <https://medium.com/remote-work/the-pros-and-cons-of-working-remotely-d526d7a34b0d>. As of 20.07.2021.

2) Improving the skills of searching for information, awareness of personal responsibility for the decisions made. To solve an urgent issue that arose during the performance of a task, a remote worker has much fewer opportunities to ask for «help from a friend», he is forced to independently solve organizational problems and operational difficulties by searching for the necessary information on the Internet, and this is another con of remote work. For psychological health, this criterion is important in terms of promoting the development of leadership skills.

3) Remote work allows you to devote more time to family members. By working remotely and free from the need to spend time on the road, as well as considering the possibility of agreeing on a flexible schedule with the employer, the employee can pay more attention to the children, husband, and parents. In addition, there is more time to solve everyday problems, whether it is fixing a broken chair, or filing a declaration with the tax office. Having obvious advantages over office work, remote work also has a number of «pitfalls» for the psychological health of an employee, among which the following should be highlighted:

1) Increased dependence on mobile devices. According to research conducted by Sara T., Dellve L, Annika H. And Mats H., frequent use of mobile devices (smartphones, tablets, other gadgets) «leads to symptoms of depression, sleep disturbance and increased stress levels»¹³. In addition, teleworking increases the risk of developing nomophobia, that is, the fear of being left without a mobile phone.

2) Professional burnout and increased working hours. A remote worker, as mentioned earlier, does not have a specific schedule, while the volume of work remains the same, and often increases. All this can lead to an increase in the length of the working day, blurring the line between work and personal life, as well as the emergence of depression and constant feelings of tiredness. As DOIST founder Amir Salihefendić notes, «when you work from home, it's easy to fall into bad habits and spiral downward. There's no concrete start and end time to structure your day around...It's hard to know when you've accomplished enough to feel satisfied. It's tempting to tack on extra hours today that you'll pay for in fatigue and burnout tomorrow»¹⁴.

3) Exacerbation of feelings of loneliness. In the age of social networks, instant messengers, developed transport infrastructure and means of communication, loneliness,

¹³ Thomee, S., Dellve, L., Harenstam, A., Hagberg, M.: Perceived connections between information and communication technology use and mental symptoms among young adults - a qualitative study. BMC Public Health. 2010, p.38.

¹⁴ Salihefendić A. What Most Remote Companies Don't Tell You About Remote Work. Available at: <https://blog.doist.com/remote-work-mental-health/>. As of 20.07.2021.

however, continues to be an acute psychological problem. For many people, the means of remote communication do not solve the problem of loneliness, but often develop in a person a sense of alienation from friends and colleagues.

2.3. Influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on improving the organization of distance work.

2020 year was marked by an unprecedented increase in the number of remote workers. Before the COVID-19 pandemic in the European Union, the number of distance work employee ranged from 10% or less (Czech Republic, Poland, Greece, Italy) to 30% (Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark), in the United States this figure was approximately 20%, in Japan - 16 %; in 2020, according to the International Labor Organization, in the European Union, the percentage of remote workers ranged from 40 to 60% of the total number of workers (depending on the country)¹⁵.

According to the European Union Framework agreement on telework of 2002, the remote employee manages the organization of his working time independently. By virtue of paragraph 4 of the said agreement, «employment conditions, teleworkers benefit from the same rights, guaranteed by applicable legislation and collective agreements, as comparable workers at the employer's premises. However, in order to take into account, the particularities of telework, specific complementary collective and/or individual agreements may be necessary»¹⁶.

The heads of the company's structural divisions are faced not only with the problem of physically separating the team of subordinates, but also with the need to develop individual work plans and distance work schedules with employees, so that the latter have the opportunity to take care of children and elderly family members, as well as maintain their home life.

Thus, work managers bear a special responsibility in providing psychological and emotional support to distance work employee, as well as minimizing the negative psychological impact of remote work on the health of the latter. The following measures are intended to achieve this goal:

¹⁵ International Labor Organization (ILO): Practical Guide on Teleworking during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. Available at: https://www.ilo.org/travail/info/publications/WCMS_751232/lang--en/index.htm. As of 20.07.2021.

¹⁶ European Trade Union Confederation: Framework agreement on telework (Brussels, 16.07.2002). Available at: <https://www.etuc.org/en/framework-agreement-telework>. As of 20.07.2021.

- setting deadlines for completing tasks, taking into account the specifics of remote work. Excessive demands and emotional pressure on remote employees can lead to increased stress and professional burnout of employees;
- development of effective mechanisms for interaction of teleworkers with each other;
- ensuring access of a remote worker to the necessary information systems (legal systems, corporate document management system, etc.);
- an individual approach and analysis of professional skills in relation to each individual employee, which ensures the possibility of an effective distribution of tasks within the team;
- work managers should pay special attention and, in this regard, show interest in the process of performing tasks by the employee, which will facilitate the prompt resolution of emerging problems, the formation and maintenance of trusting relationships between the manager and the employee;
- The work supervisor should try not to disturb the employee during off-hours (taking into account the employee's individual work schedule).

The basis for improving the process of teleworking is undoubtedly digitalization (a socio-technological evolutionary process taking place at the individual, organizational, social and global levels and in all sectors of the economy)¹⁷. With regard to the organization of the work process, digitalization can be defined as a steady increase in the use of cloud technologies, computing power and planning mechanisms, and, in addition, the massive implementation of web applications on various platforms, which allows for effective remote access and collaboration of remote employees. Among the most significant programs for remote access are AnyDesk, TeamViewer, Ammyy Admin, Radmin. Some employers practice the use of special software for remotely tracking employee actions while using a computer. Meanwhile, as the International Labor Organization notes, «tools that track keyboard hits, mouse movements, or the physical location of workers are intrusive and are therefore not recommended»¹⁸. Such control in a significant number of cases leads to the opposite results: a decrease in labor productivity indicators and the quality of work performed. In addition, these tools should not replace management based on the analysis of the final results of the work, as well as the appropriate formulation of the deadlines for the completion of work.

¹⁷ Legner, C., Eymann, T., Hess, T., Matt, C., Böhmman, T., Drews, P., et al. Digitalization: opportunity and challenge for the business and information systems engineering community. *Business & Information Systems Engineering*, 59(4). 2017. p. 303.

¹⁸ International Labour Organization (ILO): Practical Guide on Teleworking during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. Available at: https://www.ilo.org/travail/info/publications/WCMS_751232/lang--en/index.htm. As of 20.07.2021.

Among the most important measures to prevent the development of a depressed psychological state of employees, to reduce the risk of depression and irritability, one should also highlight the provision of employees with high-speed Internet access, furniture, whose ergonomics are suitable for working at a computer. The employer should also inform employees of the need to take preventive measures to prevent musculoskeletal disorders.

Because long-term telecommuting is different from the usual «office style», the process of managing a team of distance work employee creates both new challenges and new opportunities. Companies should recognize the fact that the current situation requires the formation of an updated approach to the corporate training system (advanced training, vocational training), in order to acquire new skills for both employees and managers.

Taking into account the needs arising in the process of professional activity, employers, on the basis of regular surveys among employees, are recommended to organize distance learning, webinars and seminars among employees and managers. The undoubted benefit for work managers will be the passage of special training courses on the topic of improving leadership skills in the conditions of remote management of teams of workers, including in crisis conditions, including also coaching and mentoring.

UN Women and the International Labor Organization recommend that when organizing remote work, companies are encouraged to pay particular attention to the gender aspects of women's work. When recording working hours and summarizing the results of certification, the employer must develop a flexible approach to female workers, whose professional responsibilities are also «wedged in» by the need to provide childcare and housekeeping. Employers need to have an active policy of promoting equal sharing of household and family care responsibilities between men and women through the use of social media, blogs, forums and instant messengers. Such a policy can manifest itself in the formation of general recommendations, campaigning and the use of examples of positive experiences of equal distribution of responsibilities between women and men - leaders, including recording short videos and creating collages. Thus, «it is important that when using the new model of work organization, women and men have equal conditions for remote work and can successfully overcome the conflict between work and personal life»¹⁹.

¹⁹ International Labour Organization (ILO): Practical Guide on Teleworking during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. Available at: https://www.ilo.org/travail/info/publications/WCMS_751232/lang--en/index.htm. As of 20.07.2021.

To prevent the development of a sense of loneliness among teleworkers, employers also commend the organization by employees of virtual teas, coffee breaks, lunches and team activities that are possible online (for example, playing chess).

2.4. Psychological difficulties of remote work

Earlier, we have already touched on some aspects of the psychological difficulties of remote work. Let's consider them in more detail.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, most of us had no experience of working remotely - a significant part of large companies prefer to send to remote work only employees whose professional activities are exclusively related to working at a computer (system administrators, accountants and lawyers). However, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, well-known events occurred that caused the transfer of most workers to remote work. Today, as the vaccination process is gaining momentum and the COVID-19 pandemic is gradually declining (as we hope)²⁰, many companies have decided to leave some of their staff to work remotely. The reason is simple - a significant reduction in the number of employees working in the office led to a decrease in rented space and, consequently, to a decrease in office rental costs. At first, this method of organizing working time promised some advantages - it was both a flexible schedule and the ability (after the removal of quarantine restrictions) to travel with a laptop, staying in touch with the employer, and performing his orders as needed. Remote work, at first glance, promises bright prospects, and most importantly, it seems to give freedom for life and creativity.

The first blow fell on dreams of travel and freedom. First, for full-fledged travel, it is necessary to have a significant amount of money that a significant number of the population does not have. Add to this the lack, in some cases, of the possibility of uninterrupted access to the Internet (especially in rural areas), and your dreams of endless travel will dissolve like sugar in tea. Secondly, many of us are psychologically attached to a home or a certain area - there we were born, raised, raised children, and a trip to another city within the state of residence already seems to us a big event. Therefore, a very large-scale trip is not an event for everyone. And this is not just a theoretical invention of the author. Here's what Benjamin Pollack has to say about

²⁰ This information is plausible for the vaccination processes in the Czech Republic (vaccines: Vaxzevria (AstraZeneca) and Spikevax (Moderna): (source: covid.gov.cz) and in the Russian Federation (vaccines: Sputnik V, Sputnik Lite, EpiVacCorona, CoviVac) (source: вакцина.стопкоронавирус.рф). Date: 27.11.2021.

it: «then I gradually stopped taking advantage of the benefits remote work was supposed to provide. At the beginning, I'd routinely go for walks or hit the gym midday, I'd echo an on-site Khan Academy tradition and make fresh loaves of bread, I'd take breaks to meditate. I'd even occasionally work from nearby parks...But, gradually, that stopped, eventually hitting a point where, more often than not, I would go multiple days of barely leaving my apartment. I created an off-color dent in the rug in front of my computer because I was moving so little»²¹. So, speaking of distance work, we should of course note that it theoretically provides opportunities for travel and work in any comfortable «location» - a park, a country house, a café or even a beach. But the realities are such that people relatively rarely manage to take advantage of these opportunities - due primarily to psychological as well as organizational reasons.

Further more. Work in the absence of direct contact with the team and management has its own characteristic psychological costs, which at first imperceptibly, but inevitably affect the general psychological state of the employee. The first manifestation of the psychological problems of remote work is the feeling of isolation from the team and current affairs of the company. Working in the office, you communicate every day with colleagues and management, learn the latest news and sometimes gossip, thereby satisfying the usual human need for communication. In remote work, the social circle, as a rule, narrows down to your family members and neighbors. You really start to gradually drop out of the team, and a general chat will not help in any way here: you cannot reasonably enter into a general dialogue about events that you are not a witness or participant in. A remote worker turns into a kind of ghost, a shadow - he is somewhere present, and even performs a certain job, but, at the same time, he is divorced from the business realities of the company and events in the team. In a personal meeting, it turns out that work colleagues believe that a remote worker is doing anything, but not strenuous work. «How much free time you have now»; «Did you do all the things at home?»; «I wish we could relax as much as you do!» - all these assumptions from the mouths of office colleagues lead to the breakdown of friendly relations with them and the appearance of a feeling of discomfort during personal meetings. So, another psychological problem of remote work is **dropping out of the work collective**.

Errors and mistakes made in the work process are transferred by a remote worker much more painfully than his office «brothers» feel, and there are several reasons for this. First, the

²¹ Pollack, B. Working remotely, coworking spaces, and mental health. Available at: <https://www.bitquabit.com/post/working-remotely-coworking-and-mental-health/>. As of 20.07.2021.

company's management is often more demanding on distance work employees, since they believe that the latter have more time to prepare and search for information than full-time employees. Accordingly, a «work slip» of a remote employee can cause a more harsh reaction from higher-level employees than if the work was performed in the office, in direct contact with the boss. On the other hand, the employee in this case has less chances to reasonably justify his mistake, since very often in the eyes of the management such an employee a priori looks like a potential «scapegoat». In the minds of the management, it may look something like this: «he (she) sits at home, it is very likely that most of his work time is distracted by YouTube or Netflix, does everything at the last moment, so he does it badly». Even if the work is done well, but there is a small oversight in the paperwork, such an error is likely to be treated more harshly than a similar slip by an office colleague. Here, in addition, the absence of direct (physical) contact with the management plays a huge role, since human relations play an important role in this aspect. Finally, as noted earlier, the workflow of a remote employee is intangible to the rest of his colleagues: they do not observe mental work, they do not have the ability to assess the amount of information that the remote employee has processed and sorted. As the founder of Doist Amir Salihefendic aptly stated in this regard, in contrast to a traditional office, remote work puts much more focus on output — what did you get done — rather than input — how many hours did you spend doing it»²². Thus, we should note the problem of **increased psychological responsibility of a remote worker for the results of his work.**

For a remote employee, the problem of self-discipline and self-control becomes especially urgent. A simple example. You turn on your computer to open the program you want and begin the guide's assignment. Suddenly, a notification about an unread message on a social network, which you, of course, decide to read, is displayed on the screen in a friendly way - after all, this process will take only 2-3 minutes. The next time you look at your watch, you find that you have spent almost half an hour on the social network. Hurriedly closing it, you suddenly remember that you have an empty refrigerator, and you need to open a food delivery site, and now 1 hour of working time has been spent on extraneous matters. During the working day, you will open a social network or Youtube more than once in order (as you justify yourself in your thoughts to yourself) to give your brain a rest. And the end of the office work day has already come, but not the end of your work day, because you spent part of your work time watching cats on Youtube or dreaming about a new smartphone on the Apple website. Of

²² Salihefendić A. What Most Remote Companies Don't Tell You About Remote Work. Available at: <https://blog.doist.com/remote-work-mental-health/>. As of 20.07.2021.

course, you can say that a remote worker does not have the opportunity to mess around if they install a working time tracker or a screen status monitor, but in practice, few employers will take this step: after all, this means a lack of trust between the employer and the employee, which does not contribute to the establishment of trust relationship. So, Todd Kunsman shared his experience in this regard: «...remote work can lead you down a rabbit hole on the internet as well as other distractions. At first, when I started working remotely, I was tempted to do other time-wasting things...All of a sudden I wasted over an hour and got nothing done»²³.

A very significant psychological problem for many teleworkers is chronic overwork, and, as a result, **professional burnout by leaps and bounds**.

There may be two main reasons for overtime: 1) the employee spends part of his working time on extraneous activities (from Internet surfing to personal family matters); 2) the employee falls into pervasive perfectionism, and works well beyond the eight-hour workday. The first case arises from weak self-discipline, in which case the employee should attend to improving the latter. The second case is really dangerous in the psychological aspect (and not only) of the employee's health day. First of all, the boundaries between personal life and the tasks set for you by the employing company are finally erased, and the days fly by in the "work-sleep-work" mode. You begin to feel that you are just an impersonal small part of a large working mechanism of the company, which does not have its own desires, thoughts, and aspirations, living only in the rhythm set by the employer, and only in order to satisfy the interests of increasing the company's income. You finally «lock yourself up» in your apartment, stop going out, and even spend time with loved ones, which affects family relationships. Very soon a period of intellectual decline begins, which is the beginning of a prolonged depression. The quality of the work you do starts to decline, and you are forced to work even longer, while your mental strength refuses to work hard. If you try to change tactics and start working strictly on schedule, this will inevitably cause dissatisfaction with the management, who are used to taking for granted your over-planned work. At the same time (the world is unfair!) - your overwork will not be properly evaluated, because, as noted above, the management is poorly aware of the enormous efforts you made to complete the task: the final result is important for the bosses, and not what the process of achieving it. Thus, the path of excessive perfectionism and attempts to achieve a better result at the expense of your own health and personal life will

²³ Kunsman, T. How Remote Work Better Prepared Me for Organizing My Finances and Helped Me Save Money. Available at: <https://goodmenproject.com/featured-content/how-remote-work-better-prepared-me-for-organizing-my-finances-and-helped-me-save-money/>. As of 20.07.2021.

lead to the emergence of even greater irrepressible appetites for the results of your work activity, and in personal life - to scandals in the family and general depression.

A kind of psychological problem for many distance work employee is the **problem of finding a work space**. Working from home can also present a psychological difficulty in the aspect that a house (apartment) for a person is a place of rest and rest, and a sharp change in this state can at first lead to difficulties in transforming a house (apartment) at a subconscious level from a place where a person rests from work, where he hurries after work, to the place where he directly works. Previously, a person who does not have experience in the «freelance» style can take a long and painful approach to the realization of the fact that from now on his room is not only a place where he rests and does his personal affairs, but also a place where he deals with strangers for him with company affairs. Thus, the working process invades a person's personal life at the level of «territory capture».

An unpleasant feature of remote work is the extremely **low likelihood of career growth**. In addition, due to the lack of «live» contacts with colleagues, counterparties and management, a remote worker may have problems with business communication, and the skills required to work in a management position will be poorly developed. The company needs a remote worker because he consistently and successfully performs the set of tasks assigned to him. Earning the approval of the management of the structural unit and attracting the attention of the company's top management are tasks that are practically impossible for a remote employee. The lack of career growth inevitably leads to thoughts that your work is undervalued, and you are undeservedly deprived of the benefits associated with climbing up the corporate ladder, which, in turn, can lead to depression.

Finally, the most pressing problem of remote work is **loneliness**. At first glance, it may seem that this problem is far-fetched - in the end, no one locks the remote worker in the apartment, and does not forbid him, firstly, to work from any place convenient to him (be it a cafe, park, street or suburban home), and, secondly, lead an active life after the end of the working day (meeting with friends, spending time with family, etc.). However, as noted above, very often remote workers, due to psychological, material or organizational reasons, carry out their work exclusively from home, therefore, they practically do not contact other people, except for family members (with the exception of «outings» to nearby shops and cafes). After the end of the working day (taking into account possible overwork), fatigue appears, and free time is «eaten up» by household chores (cooking, cleaning, caring for children, etc.). The so-called «happy hours» - the non-working hours that many of us like to spend with friends (over a beer in a bar, playing football or just walking around the city) are inaccessible to most

teleworkers - and this is also one of the manifestations of global problems of loneliness of distance work employee.

Antsipava, D. notes that: «increasing isolation also leads to an employee experiencing a lower sense of belonging to the company, which leads to lower employee retention as it raises intentions to leave»²⁴.

Having considered the most significant psychological problems of remote employees, let's move on to considering the issue of ways to overcome the psychological difficulties of remote work.

2.5. Ways to Overcome the Psychological Difficulties of Remote Work

«It is not necessary that you leave the house. Remain at your table and listen. Do not even listen, only wait. Do not even wait, be wholly still and alone. The world will present itself to you for its unmasking, it can do no other, in ecstasy it will writhe at your feet»

Franz Kafka.

Speaking about the psychological problems that may arise for an employee who is at a remote work, it should be borne in mind that the final nature of the problems mentioned, and, therefore, the ways to overcome them are determined by the characteristics of the person's psychotype. Nevertheless, practicing psychologists and researchers have formulated the following recommendations for overcoming the psychological difficulties of distance work:

1. As long as remote work provides the employee with a flexible schedule, the employee can (and should) use the freed-up time productively, and this is what will allow him to both get rid of the oppressive feeling of loneliness, and maintain the tone of brain activity, preserve the existing skills and acquire new skills and knowledge. Evening courses of a foreign language allow you not only to acquire new skills that are useful for professional activity, but also to meet new people, to get emotional relaxation after a remote work day.

2. It is necessary to avoid bad habits and lead a healthy lifestyle. Good nutrition, morning jogging, afternoon walks at lunchtime will help maintain physical and spiritual

²⁴ Antsipava, D. Which social interaction challenges does remote work pose and how can you solve them? Available at: <https://runningremote.com/social-interaction-challenges-remote-work-pose/>. As of 20.07.2021.

balance. Bad habits will quickly become a daily routine, which will be very difficult to get rid of in the future.

3. Whenever possible, you should avoid overwork, and clearly separate working hours, and time that belongs exclusively to you and your family. «Don't fall into the trap of feeling that work from home time demands that you're glued to the keyboard every second without pause - nobody in the office is doing that. And don't fall into the trap of feeling like you have to prove you're being productive while remote by never taking a break»²⁵. Going headlong into work will only aggravate the depressive state, fatigue, apathy, and create involuntary anger towards others. It is necessary to remember that a person lives in order to bring good to others, to learn new things and improve himself, and to make hired work the meaning of life – mistake, that is costly for mental and physical health, will create preconditions for quarrels in the family, while heroism and overwork will not be appreciated by management.

4. Optimize your workflow. «Start by choosing a workspace separated from household noises and activity — ideally a room with a door you can close. Next, work to mentally distance yourself from those disturbances so you can fully engage with work tasks»²⁶. Have a timetable for completing tasks and overriding goals and follow the directions carefully. Remember that the less time you will be distracted by extraneous activities on the Internet and at home, the sooner your working day will end, and the sooner you will be able to go outside, do your favorite hobby, spend time with your family. It is not recommended to work and listen to music or watch a clip on Youtube at the same time. This leads to a distraction of attention, a decrease in the level of concentration on the primary task and a drop in labor productivity. In general, minimizing distractions is the most important factor in organizing a workspace. If you like to play computer games or a console, do not give yourself indulgence, do not listen to the advice of the inner demon: «let's play for only half an hour, and then we'll sit down to work, because you can relax and get a charge of good mood for the whole day». After an hour of computer gaming, you are likely to feel tired to a much greater extent than after an hour of normal remote work: modern computer games require a lot of concentration, advanced brain work, and create a lot of emotional stress caused by maximum proximity to the real life situation of a particular period. After an hour of playing Red Dead Redemption 2, you will not think about how to complete a work project, but about where to get a new horse for the main

²⁵ Antman, J. The Psychological Side of Remote Work. Available at: <https://blog.jasonantman.com/2016/08/the-psychological-side-of-remote-work/>. As of 20.07.2021.

²⁶ Abrams, Z. Psychologists' advice for newly remote workers. Available at: <https://www.apa.org/news/apa/2020/newly-remote-workers>. As of 20.07.2021.

character of the game. Switching attention from one activity to another will require precious time, which refers to the working day, and actually belongs not to the employee, but to the employer. So, in order to successfully complete the tasks assigned, the employee must adhere to the following essential rules of the organization of the working day:

- No computer games during working hours;
- Minimum visits to social networks (unless it is required for work issues);
- No video on Youtube and other services;
- No internet surfing;
- No reading books and magazines during the working day.

In addition, family people need to agree in advance with relatives and friends about the working day schedule and ask them not to distract you from solving everyday problems before you complete the tasks of the employer.

5. Agree on a mixed schedule or coworking job. Most employers are ready to go to a meeting with employees, and either offer options for working according to the "home-office-home" schedule, or rent a coworking, which is also the optimal solution to the problem of loneliness of remote employees.

Employers should take into account the potential problems and opportunities associated with the transition of employees to remote work mode (taking into account family and life situations, the nature of the work, the employee's experience). Employees and their associations should take an active part in the decision-making process through a constructive dialogue with the employer, including consultations, information exchange and negotiations.

Practical part

3.1 Methodology.

Practical research within the framework of this work is divided by the author into three equivalent parts. The first study is devoted to the issues of psychological perception of remote work in relation to workers of different age categories and professions, then the author, using the interview method, will form a final assessment of the factors that influence the psychological attitude of workers to remote work. Finally, the third part of the study will

contain a consolidated approach to the positions of respondents on ways to correct the existing psychological difficulties of telecommuting.

The main research issues to be developed in the framework of the practical part are:

1. To form a general picture of the phenomena and factors on the basis of the respondents' answers, which underlie negative and positive psychological effects of remote work;
2. To determine which conditions of remote work are more conducive to a favorable psychological climate, and which entail psychological problems;
3. To form conclusions about the subject of the study, having statistical and practical significance.

3.2. Methods and respondents.

The author, to solve the mentioned problems, applied empirical methods of psychology (interviewing method, observation method).

The structured interview was applied by the author by conducting detailed oral interviews among 30 people. The interview highlights 20 main questions related to the subject of the research, and also takes into account the individual characteristics of the interviewee's personality, which is reflected in the assessment of factors that can lead to psychological problems in telecommuting workers. On the basis of the answers of the interviewed persons, the degree of involvement and attitude of the participants to the problems of the research was determined.

The observation method was used by the author by analyzing the behavior of workers/employees, transferred to remote work. In the process of interacting with them, the author analyzed the degree of expressiveness of their speech, the features of speech expressions and the vocabulary used, the logic of their behavior.

The results of the research carried out by the author are summarized in a general statistical summary (consolidated information, reflecting the key indicators on the basis of which the author comes to conclusions, which have the greatest importance in the context of the study) and presented, including in the form of diagrams.

The choice of the respondents (in the context of interviewing and observation methods) is due to the need to obtain versatile results in various categories of professions, ages, positions, as well as taking into account the gender difference of the respondents. The first step is to select a respondent from among workers/employees who have a long experience of remote work. Further, the author conducts direct work with respondents, using interviewing and observation methods. The age categories of the respondents range from 18 to 65 years old. Among the professions of the respondents, the most typical for remote work appear: lawyer, economist, procurement specialist, sales manager, programmer, designer, translator, help desk specialist, etc. In addition, the author considered the need to choose respondents with different living conditions that affect the psychological perception of distance work. Thus, some of the respondents are married, some of them have children, the other part is not burdened with the need to fulfill family responsibilities. All of these study participants in the process of remote work in the technical aspect (provision of communication means, high-speed Internet, computers and software) had equal indicators, which makes it possible to take into account the psychological component of remote work, without being distracted by the technical and organizational aspects. There were 30 respondents from 18 to 65 years old, among which there were 15 men and 15 women from Russia, the Czech Republic and the USA (20 women and men from Russia, 5 women and men from the Czech Republic and 5 women and men from the USA).

3.3. General notes on the research process.

In general, the results of the research conducted by the author are correlated with statistics and conclusions, which are contained in the results of independent studies. The attitude to remote work of the author, meanwhile, in a number of cases differs significantly from the experience that was demonstrated by the research participants. The author's attitude to distance work is generally positive, since the author himself, due to psychological and organizational aspects related to his personal experience of distance work, basically did not experience those negative phenomena that relate to the psychological aspects highlighted in this work. However, some acquaintances of the author have the opposite experience, for whom the experience of remote work is rather negative.

The process of attracting people to participate in interviews was quite quick and successful. As it turned out, most people are ready to share personal experiences and emotions associated with a difficult period of transition and adaptation to remote work for them.

Conventionally, the factors influencing the psychological attitude of employees to distance work can be divided into the following subgroups:

1. Factors related to the personality of the employee;
2. Factors related to the organization of remote work by the employer;
3. External factors.

These factors are developed by the author on the basis of the analysis of sources and literature, used during writing this work, as well as on the basis of own conclusions made, when summarizing the results of the study

The first group of factors includes:

1. The employee's hobbies, their nature (group / single);
2. The age of the employee;
3. The employee has a family, the number of young and elderly family members;
4. The profession of the employee;
5. Previous experience of remote work.
6. The employee has bad habits (smoking, alcohol, fast food) / the employee maintains a healthy lifestyle.

The second group of factors includes:

1. The relationship between the employee and the work manager (trusting nature, the ability of the work manager to be sensitive to the employee's personal and psychological problems, adequate scope and timing of tasks, sessions of online communication between the manager and employees with suggestions for streamlining the work process, support for employee initiatives, etc.);
2. Technical support of the employee by the employer for the period of remote work (if necessary);
3. Organization of professional training of employees during the period of remote work;

4. Guarantees and rights of the employee in the employment contract (additional agreements to it) in connection with telecommuting;
5. Social security of employees by the employer (medical insurance, measures of additional material support, etc.).

The third group of factors is the following:

1. Availability of support (psychological, material, social) from the state and municipalities;
2. The stability of the Internet connection;
3. News background (pandemic, military threat).

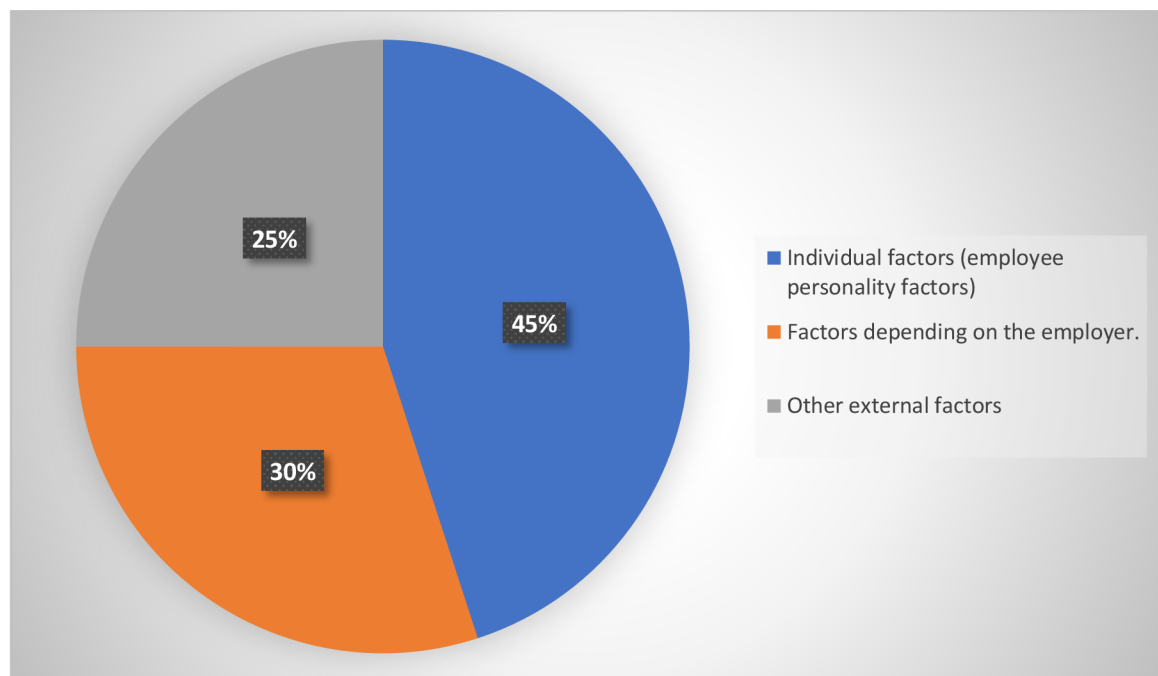


Figure 1, factors affecting the psychological attitude of employees to remote work. Source - results of interviews and observations conducted by the author.

Thus, the prevailing group of factors are individual factors that characterize the personality of the employee (his habits, the degree of involvement in the team, the presence of a family, etc.). An important role, as we see, is also played by the actions of the employer and the work manager. The role of the government and other external factors in this process is less, but also quite significant.

4. Conclusions and assessment of the study.

4.1. Positions and responses of respondents.

The interview with respondents includes 20 main questions, listed below.

1.	Your gender?
2.	Your age?
3.	Your profession?
4.	Your Family status?
5.	Do you take care of children / elderly family members on a regular basis?
6.	Did you have distance work experience before 2020?
7.	Do you have any hobbies / interests?
8.	Have you felt lonely during the period of remote work and/or restrictive measures imposed in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic?
9.	Have you kept in constant contact with colleagues during remote work?
10.	Have you experienced difficulties in concentrating during remote work?
11.	Have you dreamed of returning to the office during the remote work period?
12.	Have there been any facts of regular overwork during remote work?
13.	Have you experienced serious psychological problems (depression, paranoia etc.) while working remotely?
14.	Have you coped with running a household in a remote work environment?
15.	What was your standard meal plan while working remotely (fast food or healthy food)?
16.	Have you experienced being overweight and / or other health problems associated with a sedentary lifestyle while working remotely?
17.	Have you ever felt a sense of isolation from the team of employees?
18.	Has your employer organized online training courses (seminars/webinars)?
19.	How do you evaluate the experience of remote work in general (positively or negatively)?
20.	Would you switch to the format of remote work on a permanent basis?

Table 1. The content of the interview on the topic «The psychological influence of distance work on employees in business». Source - Results of interviews conducted by the author.

Here are some labels of observations, which allow to create an idea of the categories of respondents, the circumstances of the study and the answers, received by the author.

Box 1.

Name of respondent: Y.A.

Country: Russia.

Gender: man.

Age: 27.

Profession: in-house lawyer (governmental organization).

Experience of remote work: more than half year.

The main position about pros and cons of remote work (quote):

«The main advantage of remote work, in my opinion, is the relative freedom of the remote worker. If (as in my case) you do not have a strict schedule (that is, the employer does not oblige you to be in front of your laptop from 9:00 to 18:00; the main thing is that you complete your received tasks on time), you have the opportunity to use your free time for self-education, reading, walking and hobbies. Another advantage of remote work is that there is no need to spend time on a road to your place of work, you are spared from a stressful morning trip on public transport. The flip side of the coin is, firstly, difficulties in self-organization (sometimes it is difficult to force yourself to do the task on time), secondly, blurring the boundaries between home and work (in the sense of the workplace), and, finally, isolation from the team and colleagues at work. If your status as a «remote employee» is temporary, it can sometimes be very difficult to return to the old rhythm of work in the office. In general, the profession of lawyer mostly fits into the mode of remote work, however, of course, personal presence is often required (for example, participation in a court hearing)».

Box 2.

Name of respondent: P. R.

Country: USA.

Gender: woman.

Age: 38

Profession: accountant

Experience of remote work: more than year.

The main position about pros and cons of remote work (quote):

«Actually, you asked me an interesting question. What are the advantages of remote work for me? The fact is that I spend more time with my children and my husband, who works as a web designer, so he spends most of his time at home. Remote work also allow me to get into what I always wanted to do: investments. I have studied several serious books on investing in stocks, and now I invest in securities quite productively, that allows me to earn additional income, which I save for the future education of my children. As for the disadvantages...perhaps I miss my colleagues a little, the days when we walked together after work. Now you can't lure them out of their flats. Otherwise, remote work suits me completely».

Box 3.

Name of respondent: M.R.

Country: USA.

Gender: man.

Age: 55

Profession: hydraulic engineer

Experience of remote work: half year.

The main position about pros and cons of remote work (quote):

«What does it feel like to be a remote worker for a hydraulic engineer? It's horrible. Firstly, my profession is absolutely not suitable for such a way of organizing work. I need to see the mechanism in front of me, to be able to check the operability of all systems and mechanisms, but this is not possible in the conditions of remote work. Secondly, I feel, in a sense, disconnected from reality. For me, virtual systems are not a substitute for physical presence in the workplace. Moreover, I feel numb from sitting behind the screen of my laptop every day. I become aggressive, quarrel with my spouse. Simply put, I do not consider remote work to be the optimal way out of the situation in which our world has been for two years».

Based on the extraction of the key features of the results of the study, the author made the following conclusions:

1. The level of psychological difficulties (anxiety disorders, panic attacks, etc.) in people who do not have interests and hobbies, or whose passions and hobbies are associated with the mandatory participation of a group of people (sports, hiking, motorcycle racing, airsoft) is significantly higher than in people who have hobbies that do not require the participation of another person (reading books, cooking, numismatics, gardening, etc.). The hobbies chosen by a person are determined, among other things, by the psychotype of a person. It is much harder for an extrovert to endure forced (even temporary) isolation, including remote work, while an introvert is much calmer about remote work. Thus, when determining how psychologically difficult a remote work mode is for an employee, one should take into account, among other things, the presence of his passions (hobbies), and their nature (group/ single).
2. 6 respondents reported that they systematically worked outside of the working day, and work managers had a habit of contacting them outside of the working day, sending urgent tasks both early in the morning and late in the evening. This deprived employees of the

opportunity to plan their personal affairs, and also left no time for leisure, created a sense of anxiety and uncertainty.

3. 5 respondents living with other family members reported that they had conflict situations in the family during remote work, caused by the fact that close people did not understand that remote work carries the same responsibility as office work, and believed that the respondent was simply engaged in «nonsense on the Internet». In addition, the respondents noted that it is very difficult to explain to loved ones that distraction from work for personal and household affairs entails a loss of concentration and in the future the employee is forced to tune in to the task again. Such interruptions in work at the request of relatives during the interview were negatively evaluated by all respondents. However, all respondents living with other family members reported that they did not experience feelings of loneliness and depression.
4. 3 respondents reported that they mainly ate junk food during the period of remote work and gained excess weight, experienced psychological stress and depression in this regard.
5. 15 respondents noted that they mostly did not experience the negative psychological impact of remote work (depression, loneliness, problems with concentration, a sense of detachment from the team), are satisfied with the opportunity to evaluate its advantages, evaluate it positively, and are ready to continue working remotely. Another 10 respondents reported that they experienced a significant negative impact, and the remaining 5 respondents were able to quickly overcome the negative psychological effects of remote work.
6. 6 respondents who experienced negative psychological sensations from remote work are women, 3 of whom were able to work and manage the house at the same time.
7. Online training courses were organized by the employer for 4 respondents.

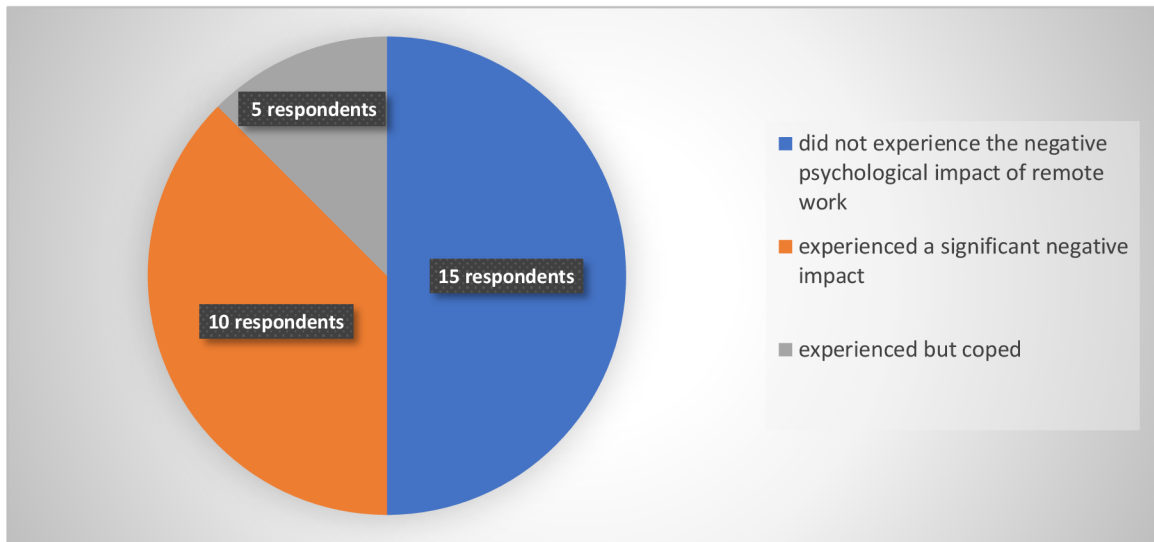


Figure 2, indicators of the psychological influence of distance work. Source - Results of interviews, conducted by the author.

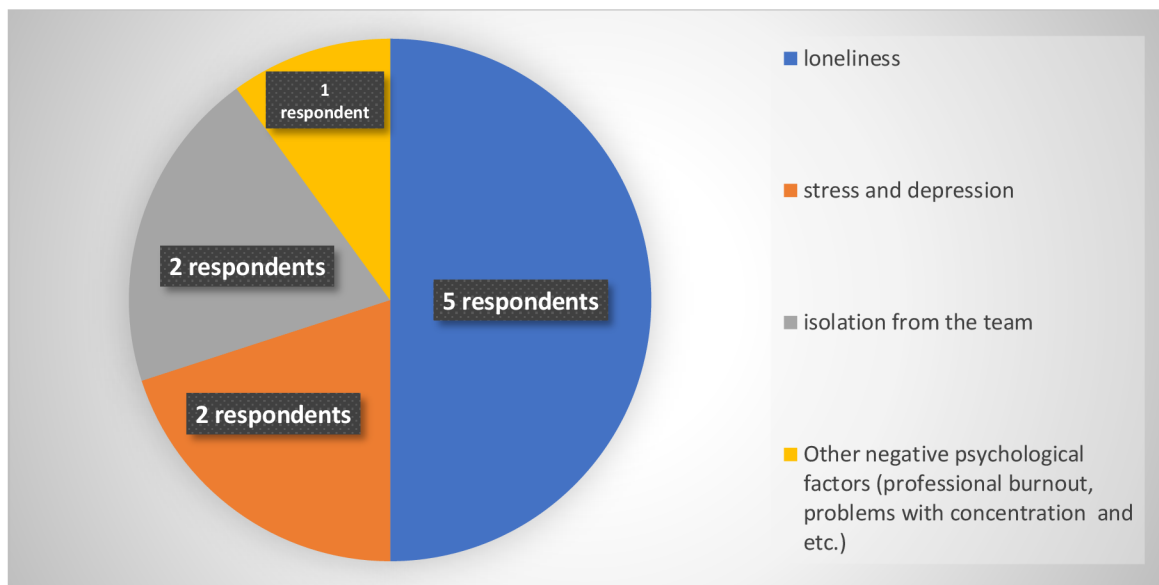


Figure 3, indicators of negative psychological factors among the interviewees, who experienced a significant negative impact (10 respondents among 30). Source - results of interviews, conducted by the author.

4.2 Psychological perception of distance work by workers of various professions and ages.

The conducted research showed that the most difficult psychologically process of remote work turned out to be for people from 25 to 40 years old (approximately), which is caused, in our opinion, by the following factors listed below.

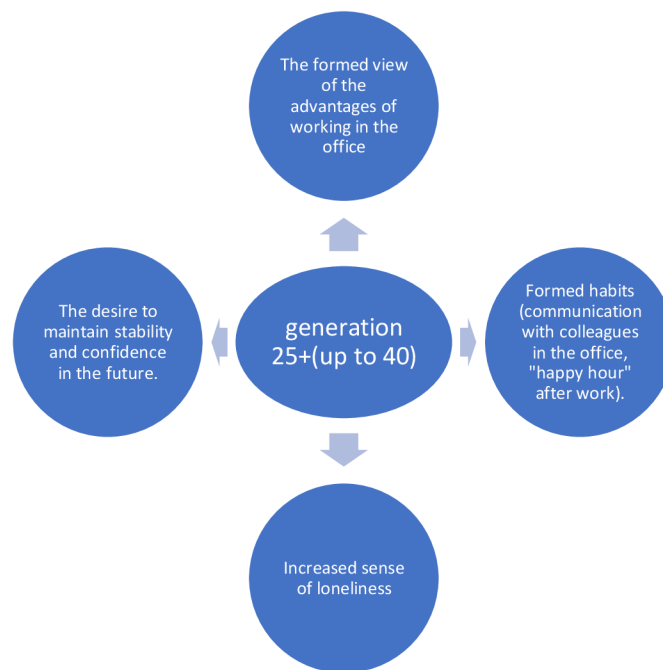


Figure 4, factors of psychological indicators of distance work for persons over 25 years old. Source - Results of interviews and observations conducted by the author.

The most psychologically mobile and able to adapt to the realities of remote work were young people from 18 to 25 years old, and older people from 40 to 65 years old. Younger people who make up generation Z are most involved in digitalization and Internet communications, in fact, part of their lives is turned to a parallel reality, therefore, live communication for people of generation Z is of less importance than even for generation Y, and even more so for generation X. People from 40 and older motivated their attitude to remote work by her mostly calm nature, and the opportunity to have a flexible schedule and do household chores.

The index of loneliness in these age categories did not differ significantly, a significant increase in loneliness indicators was demonstrated only by people who do not have a family over 40 years old.

The professional aspect, in this case, does not play such a significant role. For people whose professions are largely related to the use of a computer, special software and digital technologies (IT specialists, designers, system administrators, help desk specialists, bank employees), the transition to remote work was not associated with a significant stressful situation, although and among the specified contingent of persons there were those who experienced feelings of loneliness, stress and worries for tomorrow. Compared to the first group, an increased sense of stress and emotional distress was demonstrated by economists, lawyers, architects and procurement specialists.

4.3 Respondents positions on ways to correct existing psychological problems in remote work.

During the interview, a significant part of the respondents shared their practical experience of overcoming depression, irritability, and nervous state during remote work. This experience seems to be very valuable for developing practical recommendations for workers who have recently switched to remote work. Let's take a look at the most interesting tips:

1. Take short but regular breaks while working. These breaks should not be used for meals, sweets or snacks - this can become a habit that negatively affects physical health. It is also not recommended to use these breaks for computer games, watching long videos, Internet surfing, as this will entail a loss of concentration on the main tasks, and can distract you for a considerable time. However, you can also watch long entertainment or educational programs on Youtube (for example, videos about animals, historical programs), if you make it a rule to pause the video after the break time has elapsed. The recommended time for a break is 15-20 minutes every 2 hours.
2. Do not overwork, agree with the employer that is convenient for you (flexible schedule). As much as we would like to finish the work today so that tomorrow we will have a smaller volume of tasks, one should always take into account the fact that the human brain requires a change in occupation, and its resource is limited. Avoid lack of sleep, try to follow the most optimal work schedule for you, agreed with the employer. When doing this, take into account your individual characteristics: the time of greatest

productivity, the required time for rest and sleep. Some people are most productive when they work in the early morning, while others are most productive in the late evening. Typically, productivity declines in the afternoon. You can use this time for personal needs, or for a walk.

3. Keep yourself and your home clean. Take care of your appearance, shower regularly (especially in hot weather), and keep the house out of clutter and dirt. Untidiness, clutter, dust and dirt in your home can make you and your family more irritable.
4. Make the most of your free time for both your health and your financial well-being. Go for walks, excursions, lectures and workshops, learn to invest and improve your financial literacy.
5. Create separate profiles in the browser for work and for personal use (or use different browsers). This will help you not to be distracted from your work by extraneous activities.
6. Do not read work mail, chats, instant messengers, and correspondence after the end of the working day. Indicate your position to the head of work: «off-hours is my time».
7. Communicate more with family and friends, pay special attention to your spouse, children and parents, because they are your main support in a difficult situation.
8. Eat right. Do not overuse junk food, chips, nuts and other snacks. Try to cook your own food yourself - firstly, it is a useful life skill, secondly, it will save you money, and, thirdly, it will allow you to take your mind off work.

5. Discussion.

5.1 Brief comparative analysis of research results.

Despite the fact that the number of respondents, who took part in the study is limited, the author, based on the statements and positions of the interviewees, came to the conclusions, which find their confirmation by other authors. Thus, the negative factors of working from

home, which the author cited in his research, are also indicated in other works. For example, as E. Scott notes, «Remote work is characterized by the absence of the initial structuring of working time, a large number of distractions, a small amount of physical activity, difficulty in setting the boundaries of working time and time that you can devote to communication with your family, as well as personal matters»²⁷.

According to the conclusions reached by Iza Gigauri, «employees need to have a flexible work schedule to meet their duties at home»²⁸. The author agrees with this point of view, and also notes the need for such an approach to the organization of remote work.

The conclusions presented in the collective article «Remote Work and Well-being», according to which «respondents without childcare responsibilities, both on the younger end of the spectrum and older adults, were mostly impacted by loneliness»²⁹. However, the results of the interviews conducted by the author showed that the loneliness index among young people (18-25 years old) is not too high, due to the fact that the younger generation is more accustomed to communicating on social networks, and their leisure time is also associated with in many cases, using a computer. A high rate of loneliness was shown only by older non-family people.

The author also agrees with the position of N. Bloom and others that: «It will be important to develop approaches to regularly appraise performance in work-from-home arrangements, to avoid a scenario where reduced visibility of achievements leads to decrements in intrinsic motivation»³⁰. Indeed, as already noted by the author, unlike working in an office, it is difficult to evaluate the process of working at home from the side of the work manager in terms of labor intensity and the need to spend a certain amount of time on the implementation of the project (task), therefore, for the objectivity of evaluating the activities of remote workers from the management and the employer, it is necessary to develop criteria for such an assessment not only from the standpoint of the final result, but also from the standpoint of, how such a task could be performed by an employee with similar knowledge and capabilities in similar conditions.

²⁷ Scott, E. 8 Tips to Handle the Stress of Working From Home. Available at: <https://www.verywellmind.com/the-stress-of-working-from-home-4141174>. As of 20.07.2021.

²⁸ Gigauri, I. The Importance Of Employee Wellbeing During Remote Working. Kiev. Економічні науки. 2021. p. 70.

²⁹ Iqbal, S., Czerwinski, M., Suh, J., Mark, G., Teevan, J. RemoteWork and Well-being. New York, 2020. p. 4.

³⁰ Bloom, N., J. Liang, J. Roberts and Z. J. Ying, Does working from home work? Evidence from a Chinese experiment. The Quarterly Journal of Economics. 2015. p. 168.

The results of the study conducted by the author showed that the majority of respondents are ready to continue working from home even after the end of the pandemic. This conclusion also coincides with the conclusions presented by other authors in the works devoted to the organization of remote work and its psychological impact on employees. So, as noted by O. Baumann and Elizabeth J. Sander, «a significant percentage of employees, work-from-home arrangements are preferred, however organizational limitations may present a barrier to this occurring»³¹.

The author also considers relevant and useful the conclusion made by Associate Professor of information systems at SUNY Binghamton Surinder Kahai, according to which «telling people to do things differently does not necessarily work—more effective is role modeling. This means leaders should not work really long hours and send emails late in the evening, and then tell their staff to take a break»³². Indeed, the personal example of a manager who correctly allocates the time of the working day, avoids overwork and does not bother remote workers during off-hours should form the basis of the entire organization of remote work.

5.2 Distance work: to be or not to be?

The results of the study allow to come to the following conclusions:

1. Remote work can potentially be a catalyst for serious psychological problems for employees, such as loneliness, a sense of professional dissatisfaction, loss of concentration, blurring the boundaries between work and home. These circumstances should be taken into account when organizing the workflow for remote employees: in each case, it is necessary to take into account the individual characteristics of a single person, his wishes and suggestions for streamlining the workflow.

2. The employer (represented by the supervisor) should ensure that the rights of remote employees are respected in accordance with the requirements of the Framework Agreement on Telework of 16.07.2002. In addition, in order to maintain the psychological health of

³¹ Baumann, O., Sander, Elizabeth J. Psychological Impacts of Remote Working Under Social Distancing Restrictions. Bond University. 2021. p. 12.

³² Kambil, A., Brown, P. Virtual Leadership: Remote Work's Psychological Impacts (interview with Surinder Kahai). Available at: <https://deloitte.wsj.com/cio/2020/05/13/virtual-leadership-remote-works-psychological-impacts/>. As of 20.07.2021.

employees, the employer should organize online meetings (online coffee breaks, informal communication, meetings in a friendly atmosphere).

3. Remote workers very often fall into perfectionism, trying to complete all tasks in the shortest possible time, sacrificing their own time and health, which is also a serious psychological problem. In addition, remote work can lead to an aggravation of feelings of depression and loneliness in such risk group as single people who for one or another reason do not have a family. According to the author, prior to the start of the transfer of employees to remote work, it seems appropriate for the employer to organize seminars on the psychological health of employees transferred to remote work.

Since the beginning of 2020, humanity has gained massive and substantial experience of remote work. For some, this experience was the fulfillment of coveted desires for freedom, flexible schedule and work in comfortable conditions, for others - a serious psychological test, prolonged loneliness and the scrapping of all the usual ideas about the organization of work.

You should not think that remote work is only psychological problems, on the contrary, for many people such work helps to reduce stress, fatigue and burnout at work. So, the undoubted advantage, which is also important in the psychological aspect, is the absence of the need to spend time and money on the road to work. In a modern large megalopolis, the average office employee spends about 1 hour of time to get to work, that is, it takes about two hours a day to get to work and return home after work. A remote worker has the opportunity to use this time for sleep, for rest, for self-development, for communication with relatives; in the end, he can spend more morning time on work in order to finish it earlier. The absence of the need to get to work and back means for the employee, therefore, the availability of additional free time, which has its own positive psychological sides.

Loneliness can also be relative. For some people, loneliness is the impossibility of live communication with friends and work colleagues, for others, the possibility of communicating with a cat already excludes loneliness. Remote work, by itself, does not involve mandatory isolation at home – you can work in the company of your friends (the same remote workers as you) from a cafe, park, library, etc.

In general, the question of whether distance work is good or bad from the point of view of employee psychology, ultimately, cannot be given a definitive answer that would be suitable for all cases, since each person has his own psychological portrait, and his own views on the ideal organization of life. For many people, communication with colleagues at work is a

situation that is more forced than painful. The negative attitude of workers to remote work as a synonym for «loneliness» rather reflects the realities of the current pandemic, but not the essence of remote work as such. If we forbid people to go outside, we will get the righteous anger of the population; but if such prohibitions are not introduced, but a good part of office workers will not make any adjustments to the daily schedule of «home-work-home».

Another example: for most people, the opportunity to spend more time with their family is an undoubted positive aspect of remote work, but there are also such «fathers», «mothers», «spouses» who are burdened with staying in the family, for whom working in the office is a breath of air of freedom ... from everyday troubles, from crying children or from a dissatisfied husband. Thus, it should be understood that a fair and reasonable positive or negative characteristic of distance work as a social phenomenon can only be given in relation to an individual case, a specific person and his psychology.

According to the author, remote work is still a more positive phenomenon, since it allows us to feel more free, allocate time at our discretion, prioritize the result, and not the lost time in the office. Remote work allows us to devote more time to our family, ourselves and our favorite hobbies. It allows you to minimize conflict situations related to the workflow, rationally spend mental capabilities, energy and strength. Thanks to remote work, a person gets extra time for self-education and self-development, for knowing himself and the world around him. Everything else depends on the person himself.

6. Conclusion.

As follows from the above results of this study, as well as the positions of a number of authors whose works the author cites, the psychological problems of remote employees in business are complex in nature: they have a tendency to have a comprehensive impact on the psychology of a remote employee, in a number of cases, in abulia (the inability to make a decision or exercise will), passivity, reducing the concentration level, long depression, the feeling of loneliness and etc. Above, the author presents his own inventions, as well as the respondents' positions regarding ways to solve psychological problems of remote work. Nevertheless, since in this work the study of aspects of psychological problems of remote work is generalizing in nature, in order to develop approaches to prevent the development of individual psychological problems, additional, more detailed

studies are required, which, however, in their highly specialized subject go beyond the scope of this work.

It should be recognized that remote work has firmly entered our lives as a real alternative to office work, and at the moment, it is already obvious that remote work in a number of companies will be preserved even after the end of the COVID-19 pandemic (which, as the author hopes, will end soon). In this regard, employers should develop generally accepted approaches for the implementation of measures within the framework of caring for the psychological health of remote employees. These events may include, as noted above, online seminars, informal online meetings, psychological counseling courses at the expense of the employer, as well as other ways to maintain the psychological health of employees applicable in accordance with the provisions of the legislation.

The mass introduction of remote work is undoubtedly a progressive step in improving the organization of work. Whether we want it or not, however, remote work has become part of reality, and once it comes into use, it will no longer disappear, but will only spread as the labor market develops. Therefore, it is important not just to adapt to this new reality, but to make the most of all its advantages for your own good and the good of society. Therefore, overcoming psychological barriers and difficulties associated with its implementation is the most important task facing the scientific and professional community.

Eventually, whether to work remotely or to spend time in the office is chosen by a specific, individual person. The situation with such a massive experiment in organizing remote work was initiated not by the good will of the governments of the world, but due to forced situations related to the COVID-19 pandemic. But the pandemic will end one day, and human life, in general, will return to normal, using, at the same time, the experience and developments gained during the named global upheaval. And one of these very valuable developments is remote work, which allows us to live more freely and calmly, and devote much more time to the most precious thing we have – our family.

The mental health of each person is the most important value that needs to be protected and protected, and that is why it is so necessary to develop general recommendations for dealing with particular cases related to individual traits of the employee. Due to the fact that each human personality is unique, it is impossible to create such rules of remote work that would suit each of us, but we can try to convey them to all

people working on a remote system through public agitation and educational work, so that they can critically evaluate them and, if they deem it necessary, use them in practice.

The famous writer Milan Kundera in his famous novel «The Unbearable lightness of Being» wrote: «A person who dreams of leaving the place where he lives is clearly unhappy»³³. And indeed, for many of us happiness is not to leave our home, to feel calm and protected from the attacks of the outside world. And it is remote work that gives us this opportunity.

³³ Kundera, M. The Unbearable Lightness of Being. 1982. p. 12.

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