

Work models as an element of the employer brand in the Polish labour market

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Abstract— The development of digital technologies and the experience of pandemics have transformed traditional work models. The ability to work from outside the organization's headquarters for some employees has become a condition for employment. To meet these expectations, many employers are offering their employees the opportunity to provide work not only on-site, but also in hybrid or remote form. This is reflected in the content of job advertisements. This article is an attempt to indicate to what extent entrepreneurs use the freedom of employees to choose the work model to build an employer brand to attract candidates. A desk research analysis was conducted comparing secondary survey data on employees' preferred work models and data on the number of job advertisements that offer job candidates the opportunity to choose the form of work. A linear correlation was conducted to assess the potential relationship between these variables. The article does not limit itself to presenting the results of the study, but also attempts to indicate the causes and scale of the phenomenon. Due to the exploratory nature of the publication, the research hypotheses set were subjected to preliminary verification, indicating the need to continue and deepen the research.

Keywords— work models, employer branding, hybrid work, remote work, job offers

I. INTRODUCTION

Changes in the labour market due to demographic factors on the one hand, and high and often specific expectations of employees from a potential employer on the other, have made attracting the right employees a real challenge (Grenčíková et al., 2022). Therefore, entrepreneurs are increasingly choosing to build an attractive employer brand to help them attract the right candidates. Factors shaping the desired employer image include organizational culture, attractive tangible and intangible

benefit systems, working conditions or opportunities for professional and personal development (Livens and Slaughter, 2016). A factor influencing the assessment of employer attractiveness is also increasingly the possibility of flexible work arrangements. This is related to the concept of work-life balance, which, although it originated in the late 1970s and early 1980s, is particularly important for new generations of workers entering the market (Khateeb, 2021).

Until a few years ago, the ability to work remotely was a benefit, coveted by employees, but offered mainly to professionals representing selected industries. Before the pandemic, many organizations operated under the traditional office model. With the advent of Covid-19 in 2019, remote work became not just an alternative, but a necessity, as it was the only way to ensure employee health security (Radziukiewicz, 2020). Research conducted by the European Union shows that in April 2020 in Poland, when the traditional activities of many companies and institutions were being cut back on a massive scale due to the safety of citizens, and about 32 percent of employees switched to a remote work model (Eurofound, 2020). Despite the cessation of the pandemic, however, work provided from a location other than the employer's premises has remained with us permanently. There has been a paradigm shift in work, and new legal regulations in this area were also necessary, as under Polish law, work has so far been defined as the performance of work under the supervision of the employer at the place designated by the employer (Suknarowska-Drzewiecka 2020; Kobroń-Gąsiorowska, 2022). The transformation of work patterns, however, is not solely the result of concerns about Covid-19 syndrome; the pandemic merely accelerated a process that, due to the rapid development of technology, was already



progressing anyway, and the changes were unstoppable (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2021; Suozha, 2024; Zarifhonarvar, 2024). Restrictions put in place to counteract the rise in viral infections only contributed to a more rapid transformation of work patterns.

The ubiquity of work provided from outside the employer's premises has led to a crystallization of attitudes toward it on the part of both employers and employees. Working from home has ceased to be a rarely available benefit, and many employees have been able to personally learn about its pros and cons. Some emphasized the time and cost savings associated with the elimination of commuting, while others pointed to the blurring of boundaries between personal and professional life and limited contact with co-workers (Jaskulska and Rutkowska, 2022). Employers, on the other hand, while they appreciated the savings associated with maintaining office space, also struggled with the difficulties of supervising work and its efficiency (Pokojski, Kister and Lipowski, 2022). They also had to learn new patterns of leadership and management of a distributed team in a reality that was changing due to the digitization of work (Matuska and Piestrzynski, 2022).

The transformations that have taken place in the labor market in recent years have led to the emergence of three models of work: stationary, in which work is performed from the employer's premises, remote - consisting of providing work exclusively from outside the company's premises, and hybrid - combining in various proportions work from home with performance in the office. (Uru, Gozukara and Tezcan, 2022). Employees have varying expectations regarding the use of particular work models in practice. However, the availability of models offered to employees has become a factor in shaping employer brand perceptions. Employers offering this opportunity are likely to gain a competitive advantage in the market. They can more easily attract new employees with the competencies they are looking for, and they can count on increased loyalty and commitment from their employees over the long term (Ardi et al., 2024). Thus, the variety of work models offered directly affects employer branding.

II. MATERIALS, METHODS AND LIMITS OF THE STUDY

The research aimed was to find out: whether and to what extent employers in the Polish labour market are responding to the growing interest of employees in flexible forms of work, and whether the freedom of candidates to choose a work model is being used as a tool to build an image of an attractive employer. These findings are particularly relevant in the context of changes in employee preferences and market trends that became apparent after the Covid-19 pandemic. Due to employee expectations of flexibility in the workplace, remote and hybrid work for some employees have become the most desirable work models. Despite the changes in this regard relative to the pandemic period, when interest in work provided from home was greatest due to health and life safety concerns, many employees still consciously choose offers that allow them

to work from outside the office. The freedom to choose the model of work provided is a priority for them when making employment decisions. The research conducted for this article aims to determine: to what extent Polish employers adapt their offers to the preferences of potential employees, and how the ability to choose the work model affects the image of the company as an employer of choice, which promotes employer branding in Poland.

Two main research hypotheses were posed:

[H1] There is a relationship between the number of job offers offering flexible work models and candidates' expectations of the possibility of working outside the office. It is expected that the greater the number of candidates who prefer flexible work models, the more companies will include this option in their offers.

[H2] There is a relationship between the number of offers of flexible work models highlighted in job advertisements and the time that has passed since the end of the Covid-19 pandemic. It is expected that the more time that has passed since the pandemic, the more the number of flexible job offers will decrease.

The exploratory study was based on desk research analysis, including data from available labour market surveys on employee preferences for work models (stationary, hybrid, remote). Mainly data was selected from surveys conducted by the publisher of Pracuj.pl - the largest job posting portal in Poland, which conducts systematic analysis on the labour market. The analysed data covers the period from 2020 to 2024, the time of the greatest transformation of work models. This allows us to capture changes in trends regarding the flexibility of work models. Focusing on reports from a single source, allows us to reduce the errors associated with comparing surveys conducted on groups that vary in size and with different methods of data collection. The data analysed were collected using the CAWI method, and the surveys were conducted on large groups of adult Poles, ranging from nearly a thousand to about two thousand. The data on the number of job openings, on the other hand, is the service's published internal data. A comparative and correlation analysis was conducted to estimate the relationship between the number of job candidates expecting an out-of-office opportunity and the number of jobs offers providing such an opportunity, which allowed us to determine the direction and strength of the relationship between the two.

Due to the limited scope of the data and the exploratory nature of the analysis, the conclusions presented are preliminary and require further, more advanced empirical research. The purpose of the study is to identify and describe the phenomenon and generate further hypotheses. However, it should be borne in mind that the analysed data covers a unique time: the period of the pandemic and immediately after it, which was reflected in the results. Over time, the presented candidate preferences may be modified. The fact that the article is based on quantitative data limits the ability to fully understand the reasons behind employees' preferences and companies' decisions regarding the work models offered. Nonetheless, the results of the survey conducted may help to understand the

underlying trends and dynamics of the issue under study, which will also allow more targeted research to be undertaken in the future.

III. WORKERS – TOWARD FLEXIBILITY

The pandemic, which had its apogee in 2020, has had a significant impact on various aspects of social and professional life. It has made a lasting mark on the labour market by accelerating the transformation of work models. Before the pandemic, many organizations operated under the traditional model of working at the employer's premises. Working from home was associated on the one hand with cottage industry performance of simple tasks, and on the other hand with remote work of selected professionals who received this form of performance as a benefit. During the pandemic crisis, remote work no longer became an alternative, but a necessity. According to Eurostat data, before the outbreak of the pandemic, Poland was at the beginning of the second ten countries of the European Union in terms of the prevalence of remote work. 4.8% of working Poles performed work in this form (PARP, 2021). However, as early as April 2020, when closures were common due to fears of the virus, 32% of working Poles were providing work from outside the office (Eurofound, 2020). Work provided from home has become a mass phenomenon. Its popularity is evidenced by the successively increasing number of job offers offering such an opportunity. According to data from Grant Thornton - one of the leading auditing and consulting organizations, which, among other things, monitors the labour market - before the outbreak of the pandemic in January 2020, the benefit of online work included only 1% of job offers. In May of the same year, it could already be found in 6% of advertisements, and in January 2021. - w 8%. At the end of 2021 it was 15%, and in January 2022 already 18% of ads (Grant Thornton, 2022) tempted remote work. It's worth noting that at that time, many more people were likely to work remotely, as incumbent employees were also working from home. The study "Employee Benefits in the Age of Pandemic," conducted on a nationwide sample of respondents in January 2021 by the IBRIS Institute for Market and Social Research on behalf of Nationale Nederlanden, found that 43% of employers offered employees a benefit in the form of remote work (Nationale Nederlanden, 2021). In contrast, a Randstadt survey conducted the same year reveals that for 42% of respondents, the ability to work from home was a factor in the employer's attractiveness (Randstadt, 2022).

The increase in the number of jobs provided from off-site was at first a response to the threat to life and health from the pandemic. Later, however, it was already a response to the changed expectations of employees. The time of the pandemic proved that work can be done from home without wasting time and money commuting to and from work and with more time for non-work life. However, remote work has also revealed several inadequacies and even a new kind of danger. Many of those who work in this way have recognized the problem of

blurring the boundaries between work and private life, the drawbacks of doing work in a place unsuitable for it, or the need to incur additional electricity and equipment costs for working from home. This is indicated by a number of studies conducted during this period (OLX Jobs, 2021; CBRE, 2021; Antal & Cores, 2021; Randstadt, 2021). These experiences have influenced the phenomenon of interest in remote work. Nowadays, hybrid work is definitely more popular, which 49% of employees would like to do, of which 29% expect the advantage of online work us work provided stationary (Pracuj.pl, 2024). The "Working from home around the world" survey of employees worldwide found that Poles would like to work from home an average of 1.4 days a week, making their expectations among the most modest in this regard among the 34 countries surveyed (Aksoy et al., 2023). For a quarter, the ability to work from home is a determining factor in their belief that they like their jobs (Manpower, 2024). In summary, employees' expectations of being able to work from off-site have been changing over the past few years, as shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1L PREFERRED WORK PATTERNS BY EMPLOYEES IN POLAND IN 2020-24

	Remote work	Hybrid work	Stationary work
2024	16%	49%	35%
2023	28%	64%	8%
2022	14,5%	59,5%	26%
2021	13%	75,5%	11,5%
2020 *	10%	79%	11%

* Data refers to the preferred work model after the pandemic is over
Source: own compilation based on: Pracuj.pl, 2024; Pracuj.pl, 2023; Pracuj.pl, 2022; Pracuj.pl, 2021, Pracuj.pl, 2020.

The "Money Doesn't Give You Happiness" survey conducted by Pracuj.pl in 2017, i.e. long before the pandemic emerged, found that as many as 70 percent of respondents would be willing to change jobs if they could work remotely (Pracuj.pl, 2017). At the time, the concept of hybrid work was not commonly used, so this group also includes people who expected to work from home only on selected days of the week. Strong interest in working from outside the company can also be seen in the results of the 2019 "Professional Lifestyle" survey. As many as 82% of its participants viewed remote work positively, and 79% would be more likely to apply for offers from companies that provide the opportunity to work from home. However, only one in three respondents preferred employment in a completely remote model (Pracuj.pl, 2019). The prevalence of the remote work model in the pandemic has changed perceptions. In the first year of the pandemic, when working from home posed many difficulties due to the fact that both employees and employers were unprepared to perform it in such a model, interest in classic work entirely from home began to decline in favor of a hybrid model. This may indicate that employees appreciate both the flexibility of remote work and the value of face-to-face social interaction and collaboration in the office. A deeper analysis of the reports surveyed indicates that expectations for time spent in the office are also evolving. In 2021. 48.5% of respondents wanted to work there one day a week, while 21% wanted to appear there several times a month. In 2023, 38% of employees wanted to

perform their work duties at the company's headquarters once a week, and 30% wanted to be there several times a month (Pracuj.pl, 2021; Pracuj.pl, 2022; Pracuj.pl, 2023). This trend indicates that some employees are very comfortable working without more frequent contact with co-workers and the obligation of only occasional visits to the office is a desirable solution for them. This is also confirmed by the latest research from 2024, which shows that employees rate better offers that involve fewer days at the company's headquarters. Thus, working from the office a minimum of three days a week negatively affects the willingness to apply in 23% of respondents, while for one day a week the percentage of people who are less interested in an offer drops to 23%. However, there is a group of people who perceive the same restrictions differently. 34% of respondents have a positive view of job offers that involve three days in the office, and 37% are more likely to apply in response to an offer that provides for one day of work at the company's headquarters (Pracuj.pl, 2024).

The employer's openness to the freedom to choose the work model can therefore be a factor in the company's image as a modern and flexible organization. This, in turn, can attract job candidates, as well as increase the loyalty and commitment of those already employed, resulting in employee retention. This is confirmed by the aforementioned research from 2024. According to as many as 76% of respondents, the employer's openness to providing work in different models positively influences the willingness to apply for a position that offers such an opportunity. What's more, as many as 74% of employees are more likely to apply for an offer that gives them the opportunity to freely determine the ratio between remote and office-based work (Pracuj.pl, 2024). The expectation of clearly communicating whether a job offer allows for outside work was already evident during the pandemic. In 2021, 79% of respondents articulated such a need (Pracuj.pl, 2021), and 91% in 2022 (Pracuj.pl, 2022).

For many employees, flexibility in the choice of work models appears to be a key factor, in determining the decision to choose a job offer. It allows them to better manage their time, reduce the stress of commuting and reconcile work with other responsibilities, and the most popular hybrid model indicates that employees appreciate both the flexibility of remote work and the value of direct social interaction and collaboration in the office. Such attitudes among employees can be interpreted as an attempt by them to find a balanced solution that allows them to reconcile their professional and personal needs.

IV. EMPLOYERS – REMOTE FOR A SELECTED FEW

Before the outbreak of the pandemic, employers treated remote work in the category of a benefit that was motivational. Employees, most often specialists, received it as a reward. Allowing employees to work without direct supervision was also often a sign of the employer's trust in the employee. The ability to work remotely was also intended to help businesses attract professionals to work with them. The outbreak of the pandemic meant that employers quickly had to find their way

around the new reality, in which pandemic restrictions and concerns about employee health affected forms of work organization. In order to continue doing business, many employers, including against their own beliefs, decided or were forced to implement new work models. However, most were unprepared for this, both organizationally and technically (Nowacki, Grabowska and Lis, 2021). Despite difficulties related to access to documents, equipment or problems with supervising employees, many employers quickly began to look favourably on off-site work (Pokojski, Kister and Lipowski, 2022). For some of them, the spread of remote work turned out to be an opportunity to attract talent, i.e. people who would not have been able to work due to the distance separating them from the company's headquarters, and it also offered the possibility of lowering business costs due to lower expenses for office maintenance. This was particularly important for companies that experienced losses or lower-than-expected profits during the pandemic period. However, the long-term experience of working in a remote model caused some employers to take a more critical view of the benefits of employees without direct supervision. Employers have begun to point out problems with controlling employees' effective use of time (Future Business Institute, 2021). The experiences of both sides of the employment relationship have influenced changes in the perception of remote work and, consequently, expectations in this area. A hybrid work model combining work from home with on-site work began to gain in popularity, and some companies began to limit the possibility of off-site work or even to withdraw from this possibility.

A survey of large (they were the vast majority) and medium-sized companies conducted by EY in early 2024 shows that the possibility of remote work is currently offered by only 12% of employers. 88% allow work in a hybrid model, while expecting strictly defined time worked at the employer's premises. Only 23% of those providing work in the hybrid model currently have the opportunity to decide for themselves how much time they will spend in the office and how much at home. The largest portion of employers - 46% expect it to be a minimum of three days a week, 43% expect it to be at least two days, and only 11% allow it to be one day. It should be emphasized, however, that the ability to choose the place of work is strongly industry-dependent, with service companies allowing the implementation of the hybrid work model far more often than manufacturing companies. (EY, 2024). The aforementioned "Working from home around the world" study found that Polish post-pandemic employers planned to allow their employees to work from home only 0.7 days per week. This value corresponded to the number of days per week that employees actually worked in this way between April and May 2023. This meant that employers did not intend to change anything in this regard. This is one of the lowest values declared by employers among the 34 countries surveyed worldwide (Aksoy et al., 2023). The results of these surveys can be interpreted as a modest attempt by employers to meet employees' expectations. They may indicate a moderate enthusiasm for working outside the office. Nevertheless, many entrepreneurs, the labour market situation has forced them to intensify their efforts to attract new

staff. This is reflected in the working conditions offered to employees. Offers of work from home, or the possibility for the employee to choose the optimal working model for him, are used as an element of creating the image of an attractive employer. An employer who meets the expectations of candidates, is flexible and modern. One of the tools used to build a strong employer brand are job advertisements. An element intended to attract the attention of candidates in them is information about the possibility of work outside the company's headquarters. The number of such offers over the past years is shown in Table 2, which includes job offers from Poland's largest recruitment portal Pracuj.pl.

TABLE 2. THE SHARE OF PARTICULAR WORK PATTERNS IN JOB OFFERS PUBLISHED ON JOB PORTAL PRACUJ.PL IN YEARS 2019-24

	Remote work	Hybrid work	Stationary work
2024	9%*	25%	63%
2023	15%	28%	57%
2022	22%	24%	36%
2021	19%	brak danych	brak danych
2020	7%	brak danych	brak danych
2019	2,3%	brak danych	brak danych

The values do not add up to 100% due to the fact that the employer may indicate more than one work model in the advertisement.

* the status quo for March 2024

Source: own compilation based on: Pracuj.pl (2024); Pracuj.pl (2023 B); Pracuj.pl (2021 B).

The above table shows that the number of remote job offers began to increase with the emergence of the pandemic, and when the situation began to normalize, the number of offers containing the possibility of classically understood remote work, i.e. provided exclusively from home, began to decrease in favour of hybrid job offers combining work in office with work from home. On the one hand, this is related to the negative experiences of employees and employers related to the difficulty of doing all work from home. Of course, there are sectors - such as IT - where working exclusively from home works perfectly, but even in them there is a visible decline in the number of advertisements offering such work in favour of hybrid and stationary work (Justjoin.it, 2023). Hybrid work seems to be the model that will become established in the labour market for a long time. However, its further dissemination may be influenced by the results of the latest global research on the effectiveness of employees working from home, which clearly indicate that people working from outside the company's headquarters, even if they perform simple activities, work less effectively. This is due to, among others, the fact that they spend more time on short online meetings, which limits their level of concentration, and the lack of constant communication prolongs the implementation of processes. Research on a group of ten thousand employees in Asia, conducted by Michael Gibbs, Friederike Mengel and Christoph Simroth, shows that their effectiveness is reduced by 8-19% (Gibbs, Mengel and Siemroth, 2023). In turn, research also conducted in Asia by David Atkin, Antoinette Schoar and Sumit Shinde indicates an 18% lower efficiency (Atkin, Schoar and Shinde, 2023).

V. DISCUSSION – DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis of the data presented in both tables shows that entrepreneurs use the freedom of employees to choose the work model to build the employer brand to a limited extent. The growing number of people who prefer work models other than stationary is not reflected in the number of available job offers. This is also visible in a correlational study using the Pearson r coefficient, which was conducted to confirm the observed relationship between the number of people expecting the opportunity to work outside the office and the number of job offers offering such an opportunity. The correlation coefficient $r = -0.384$ was obtained. This result indicates a moderate negative correlation, meaning that as the number of people seeking work from outside the office increases, the number of job offers offering such opportunities tends to decrease. However, this value does not indicate a very strong relationship. The value of the significance coefficient $p = 0.524$ means that there is no statistically significant correlation between the number of people looking for work in the non-office model and the number of job offers offering such opportunities. However, the r coefficient suggests a certain tendency - a moderate negative relationship. It should be emphasized, however, that this result is not strong enough to exclude the possibility of this observation being accidental. Nevertheless, due to the fact that the scope of the analysed data is not wide, it can be assumed that these results confirm the conclusions from the comparative analysis. The analysis carried out allowed for verification of the hypotheses set at the beginning. The first hypothesis was only partially verified positively. Although there is a relationship between the number of job offers offering flexible work models and candidates' expectations regarding the possibility of working outside the office, it is inverse, i.e. the greater the interest in such a work model, the lower the number of offers. The second hypothesis was positively verified. It has been confirmed that the more time has passed since the pandemic, the fewer job offers there are. The latest partial report for 2024 shows a small increase in job offers with remote work options, but this may be due to seasonality and the results may be different from year to year.

However, it should be remembered that due to the fact that the correlation was carried out based on a small amount of data - only five pairs - this study has limitations in terms of the possibility of precisely estimating the relationship. The statistical power of the test is low, so far-reaching generalization conclusions cannot be drawn. Nevertheless, due to the specificity of the phenomenon and the short period of its occurrence - we have been observing changes in work models to this extent for five years, and the resulting limited availability of data, they can be treated as a supplement to the comparative analysis. All the more so because, as mentioned in the introduction, the study is exploratory in nature. The obtained results therefore provide guidelines for further research. To obtain a more complete picture of the analysed phenomenon, further quantitative and qualitative research is necessary, which would enable understanding the exact attitudes of employees and employers regarding the choice of work models. The

presented results and considerations do not, of course, exhaust the issue of the impact of work models on building an employer's brand. It seems reasonable to seek answers to questions that will allow us to better understand this phenomenon. It is worth considering the differences in the perception of the employer's brand in the context of work model preferences between different groups, distinguished on the basis of demographic characteristics or professional experience. It may also be interesting to learn about the impact of the possibility of choosing a work model on employee turnover, on their level of job satisfaction, or the role of popularizing the work-life balance concept among employees on their expectations regarding work models. These are just sample fields in which it is worth exploring this issue more deeply.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

Offering employees the opportunity to choose a work model, or creating the possibility of working entirely or partially from home, is one of the elements of building the image of an attractive employer for candidates applying for vacant job positions. However, Polish employers meet the expectations of future employees to a moderate extent, for whom the ability to choose the place of work is important. Some of them explicitly declare that they prefer to work outside the company's headquarters, because it allows them to better combine work and private life. Employers are more willing to offer hybrid work than remote work, and recently there has been an increase in job offers from the office, which may be due to the fact that they are less satisfied with the efficiency of employees working from home. The latest global research also shows that employees working from home are less effective. In Poland, this may be partly related to new legal regulations regarding remote work, which impose numerous administrative obligations on employers and the obligation to compensate employees for the costs incurred in connection with remote work. This could make remote work no longer as economically attractive from the employers' perspective as before. The same regulations mean that employees now have the right to the so-called occasional remote work 24 days a year (Szymura, 2024). This may also affect the restrained attitudes of employers, who cannot refuse to allow an employee to work remotely upon request. Cultural conditions may also have an impact on employers' approach - stationary work is deeply rooted in Polish society. Additionally, some organizations may identify strongly with office work, where collaboration, innovation and engagement are promoted through face-to-face interaction. However, it should be remembered that employers' offers may also depend on industry and geographical factors. In many sectors of the economy, such as production, retail, construction, transport and medical services, remote work is difficult to implement due to the specific nature of the tasks. This may mean that the number of job offers that allow to work from outside the office is limited to specific industries. Employers operating in regions with greater competition on the labour market, e.g. in large cities, may offer more flexibility. In regions

where there is less competition, they may be more inclined towards traditional office work, which may explain the lower number of offers for non-office work models.

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