

GEN XERS IN UNCERTAIN TIME OF WORKING REMOTELY – AN EMPLOYEE’S PERSPECTIVE

Introduction

There are representatives of four generations: BB (Baby Boomers), X, Y (Millennials), and Z, currently functioning in Polish and foreign labor markets. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the consequent rapid and massive shift to remote work, was a challenge not only for employers and managers but, above all, for employees, whose work environment and rules were radically changed overnight. Remote work has become a new professional normality for employees representing different generations, who have diverse demands, expectations, values, ways of working, communication, and so on [Twenge, 2010; Becton, 2014].

Considering the above, it seems cognitively interesting to learn about employees’ experiences in the field of remote work during the pandemic. Bearing in mind that each generation is different, the authors of this article decided to focus on generation X, which adapted to the new reality slightly differently than, for example, generation Z. Finding answers to questions about how employees adapted to remote work, whether generational affiliation was important in this adaptation process, and whether there are differences between generations in this respect can be valuable for managers of age-diverse human resources. Especially since interest in remote work is growing

* Agnieszka Żarczyńska-Dobiesz, Ph.D. – Wrocław University of Economics and Business. ORCID: 000003-0437-9428.

** Iwona Janiak-Rejno, Ph.D. – Wrocław University of Economics and Business. ORCID: 0000-0001-8064-170.

*** Barbara Chomątowska, Ph.D. – Wrocław University of Economics and Business. ORCID: 0000-0002-6506-7922.

after the pandemic experience [Eurofound, 2022]. A review of the latest literature about remote work shows that the influence of socio-demographic characteristics of workers on their attitudes toward telework continues to raise questions [Ivasciuc et al., 2022]. Further research is needed in this area. This article fits into this research gap. The aim of the article aims to present the experiences of employees who are representatives of generation X in remote work during the pandemic.

1. General characteristics of generation X

Generation X is commonly characterized in the literature as people born between 1965 and 1980 [Losyk, 1997; Jeruszka, Wolan-Nowakowska, 2020]. Macalister [1994] suggests that to understand members of generation X, we must understand the unique circumstances that affected their development. These circumstances varied indifferent countries, leading to visible differences in the characteristics of representatives of this generation, for example, from Poland and the USA. On the one hand, Polish representatives of Gen Xers grew up in the unstable times of the economic crisis of the 1970 s. They entered the labor market during a period of systemic transformation and restructuring of the economy. At that time, there was high instability in employment and unemployment. Flexible forms of work and temporary contracts were also introduced [Smolbik-Jęczmień, 2017]. As such, the times of their youth were much more demanding than those of their Baby Boomer parents. Generation X grew up in the shadows of their fathers and mothers, resulting in a kind of Gen Xers' rebellion against the Baby Boomers [Kubiak, 2014]. After the hard times of childhood and youth in the 1990s, generation X had a chance to take advantage of economic changes and adapt their professional careers to the needs of the free market. It was an opportunity to gain new knowledge and recognize modern technologies and foreign work standards. Many Xers took advantage of these opportunities, and their careers took off [Smolbik-Jęczmień, 2013].

The representatives of Gen X are often described as the overlooked, under-protected, neglected, and “latchkey generation”. In Poland, they are also referred to as the generation of the PRL¹ [Smolbik-Jęczmień, 2019]. They are the children of the overworked Baby Boomers. Many Gen Xers grew up with relatively little parental care and supervision, often coming home from school to an empty house or spending a great deal of time in daycare. Their parents were often divorced, or both worked outside the home [Kupperschmidt, 1998; Lai et al., 2012; Lissitsa, Kol, 2016]. This situation forced them to become adults at a young age, and they learned to be self-reliant very quickly [Cordeniz, 2002].

¹ Polish People's Republic.

According to Gen Xers, success can be achieved by working hard and being committed. Work is an autotelic value for them [Smolbik-Jęczmień, 2019]. They also place a high value on formal education and seek opportunities to gain new skills and knowledge, believing this will provide job security and raise their self-esteem. Gen Xers have been described as highly task-oriented, meeting deadlines, realistic, and pragmatic. Job security, career growth, and development opportunities are critical to Generation X [Taylor, 2018]. Xers usually prefer the traditional model of professional career. They are persistent in waiting for a promotion and are not in the habit of asking for raises; a high work ethic also characterizes them. Employees from generation X perform well in challenging situations, and are resistant to stress. They organize their own and their co-workers' work very well [Smolbik-Jęczmień, Żarczyńska-Dobiesz, 2017]. They respect the authority of their superiors but generally have a problem trusting hierarchical structures [Jurkiewicz, 2000; Adams, 2000]. The levels of loyalty and trust in their employers are lower than those of Baby Boomers. They tend to be more loyal to their professions [Crampton, Hodge, 2011]. Mechanistic, inflexible management styles or micro-management tactics repulse Gen Xers. They expect authentic and ethical leaders who lead by example. Gen Xers prefer leadership based on competence rather than seniority and want to be mentored rather than micromanaged. They value participatory management and expect to be included in organizational decision-making. They need independence, self-reliance, trust, and autonomy in the workplace [Taylor, 2018]. Many of them are individualistic and freedom-minded, preferring not to work in teams and wanting to do things their way. They like to be left alone to solve problems [Loomis, 2000; Hart, 2006; Gursoy et al., 2008; Benson, Brown, 2011].

The literature on the subject also emphasizes their tendency to workaholism and professional burnout, which results from their high tendency to devote themselves to work and colleagues. Generation X draws motivation to work from satisfaction, prestige, and high professional position [Smolbik-Jęczmień, 2017]. To build and maintain their commitment, managers should give them a sense of freedom and mobility. They are also motivated by employment security, financial incentives, and various benefits [Kubiak, 2014; Wiktorowicz, Warwas, 2016; Nieżurawska-Zajac, 2020]. Gen Xers were the first generation to regularly use technology, considering it a fact of life. Compared with generations immediately before them, they are generally more technologically savvy. Despite their technological skills, employees of this generation prefer direct (face-to-face), timely, honest communication [Gursoy et al., 2008; Benson, Brown, 2011; Crampton, Hodge, 2011].

2. Methodology

The aim of the article is to explore the opinions of Generation X employees on remote work during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. For the purpose of this article, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ1. What actions in work management have employers taken in connection with the transition to remote work in the conditions of COVID-19?

RQ2. What attitudes, behaviors, and actions characterized employees who were representatives of generation X at the time of switching to remote work mode?

RQ3. Which factors (individual, organizational, contextual) supported and limited Xers employees' remote work effectiveness?

RQ4. Which of the analyzed remote work areas were their answers most consistent in?

The research was carried out in the 2nd quarter of 2022 and covered the entire territory of Poland². The presented goal and research questions implied the need to select appropriate methods, techniques, and research tools. For the purposes of this article, a quantitative research method was used, specifically a diagnostic survey using the surveying technique and CAWI methods (Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing). The research tool was a questionnaire containing closed questions about the nature of a disjunctive and conjunctive cafeteria. The structure of the respondents was selected to retain features of socio-demographic parameters reflecting the distribution of these features in the general population. It was filled in by 255 people representing Generation X (born between 1965 and 1980), who were professionally active and worked remotely during the pandemic. Correctly completed questionnaires by 241 were qualified for the final analysis. The questionnaire was based on two measurement scales: ordinal (Likert scale) and nominal (binary and categorical). The survey concluded with a metric that enabled the collection of the socio-demographic characteristics of the studied population. Subsequently, a two-way data analysis method was applied as part of the adopted research methodology. Due to the nominal nature of the variables, frequency and percentage statistics were used in the statistical evaluation. For variables on the Likert scale, measures of descriptive statistics were used.

Moreover, hierarchical clustering analysis was used as part of the conducted research. This method allowed for the grouping of the respondents' most frequently coherent answers regarding the analyzed subject matter. For their graphical presentation, dendrograms were used as an output from hierarchical clustering, showing the hierarchical relationship between analyzed responses. The characteristics of the research sample are presented in Table 1.

² The results of empirical research presented in the article are part of the research conducted by the authors. The target sample was 690 respondents representing four generations (BB, X, Y, and Z). The article presents only the results of research focused on Generation X.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics on the research sample

Characteristics controlled in the study		n	%
Gender	Female	102	47.1
	Male	139	52.6
Residence	Country	67	27.8
	Small town (population below 20k)	43	17.8
	Mid-size town (population between 20k – 100k)	49	20.4
	Big city (population over 100k)	82	34.0
Business sector	Commerce	36	14.9
	Production	37	15.4
	Services	93	38.6
	Public institution/office	48	19.9
	Other	27	11.2
The size of the organization	Micro (less than 10 employees)	33	13.7
	Small (from 10 to 49 employees)	72	29.9
	Medium (50 to 249 employees)	63	26.1
	Large (over 249 employees)	73	30.3
Children	No children	22	9.1
	One child	66	27.4
	Two children	91	37.8
	Three children	48	19.9
	Four or more children	14	5.8
Home conditions	Apartment in a block/house	117	48.5
	House	124	51.5
Separate room	Yes	144	59.8
	No	64	26.6
	Sometimes yes – sometimes not	33	13.7
Pets (dog; cat)	Yes	140	58.1
	No	101	41.9

Source: own study.

In total, 241 people participated in the study, of which 52.6% were men. Respondents are residents of towns and cities of various sizes. The relatively most significant percentage of them work in the service sector (38.6%), are employed in a large company (30.3%), have two children (37.8%), live in a detached house (51.5%), work had a separate room to work in during the period of remote work (59.8%), and they were accompanied by their pets (58.1%). Quantitative research was supplemented by qualitative research through IDIs (In-Depth Interviews) conducted with HR Business Partners representing the surveyed companies to identify their perspective on the analyzed problem.

3. Results and discussion

The first question addressed to the respondents concerned recognizing their opinions on the actions taken by the employer in connection with the pandemic situation – 13 statements were verified (Table 2).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics on actions taken by employers in connection with the pandemic situation

Statement		n	%
1. Has the industry in which you work been directly affected by the Covid-19 restrictions?	Yes	139	57.7
	No	83	34.4
	I do not know	19	7.9
2. Was the company in which you are employed prepared for the transition to remote work?	Yes	164	68.0
	No	62	25.7
	I do not know	15	6.2
3. Has the company in which you are employed quickly implemented solutions enabling remote work?	Yes	213	88.4
	No	21	8.7
	I do not know	7	2.9
4. Has the employer provided an adequate material working environment for remote work (necessary equipment, internet connection)?	Yes	153	63.5
	No	79	32.8
	I do not know	9	3.7
5. Did the employer interfere with the way employees organize their work while working remotely?	Yes	101	41.9
	No	130	53.9
	I do not know	10	4.1
6. Has the employer implemented additional forms of control related to remote work?	Yes	97	40.2
	No	125	51.9
	I do not know	19	7.9
7. Did the employer inform you about the organization's situation during the pandemic?	Yes	177	73.4
	No	55	22.8
	I do not know	9	3.7
8. Has the employer adapted the incentive package to the pandemic situation?	Yes	70	29.0
	No	132	54.8
	I do not know	39	16.2
9. Has the employer attempted to integrate people working remotely?	Yes	74	30.7
	No	141	58.5
	I do not know	26	10.8
10. Did the employer encourage its employees to be physically active?	Yes	64	26.6
	No	157	65.1
	I do not know	20	8.3

Statement		n	%
11. Did the employer provide psychosocial support to its employees during the lockdown?	Yes	57	23.7
	No	160	66.4
	I do not know	24	10.0
12. Has the organization you work for made cuts during the pandemic?	Yes	55	22.8
	No	161	66.8
	I do not know	25	10.4
13. Have there been new jobs related to work in a pandemic set up in the company you work for?	Yes	40	16.6
	No	165	68.5
	I do not know	36	14.9

Source: own study.

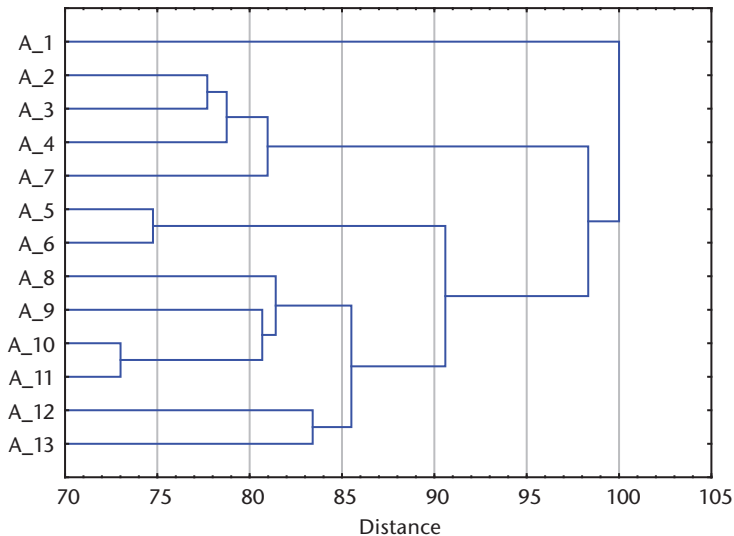
More than half of the respondents admitted that the industry in which they work was directly affected by the restrictions related to COVID-19 (57.7%). Nevertheless, two-thirds of the respondents stated that the employer did not decide to reduce jobs (66.8%) or create new jobs (68.5%). A similar percentage of respondents declared that the company was prepared for the transition to remote work mode (68.0%) and quickly implemented solutions enabling it to start (88.4%).

Due to the change in the work mode, most respondents admitted that the employer provided them with a suitable material working environment for remote work (63.5%). Nearly three-quarters of the respondents stated that the employer informed about the situation in the company (73.4%). According to the majority of respondents, the employer did not directly interfere in the organization of employees’ working time during remote work (53.9%) and did not implement additional forms of control, such as working time monitoring (51.9%).

Despite these positive actions, the respondents also pointed out negative aspects. Two-thirds of them admitted that the employer did not provide employees with psychosocial support during the lockdown (66.4%) or encourage them to undertake any physical activity (65.1%). On average, only 30% of the respondents declared that the employer attempted to integrate people working remotely (30.7%). A similar, relatively low percentage of survey participants stated that the employer adapted the package of incentives to the pandemic situation (29.0%).

The above results were indirectly confirmed through the hierarchical cluster analysis methodology (Figure 1). It was found that respondents’ most consistent responses concerned situations where the employer did not provide employees with psychosocial support and did not encourage them to be physically active. Another consistency was observed regarding the employer’s lack of interference in the organization of working time and the absence of additional forms of control. The last identified significant consistency pertained to companies that had quickly implemented remote work already being prepared for it.

Figure 1. Hierarchical clustering analysis for questions regarding actions taken by the employer in connection with their swap to remote work mode



- A_1. Has the industry in which you work been directly affected by the COVID-19 restrictions?
 A_2. Was the company in which you are employed prepared for the transition to remote work?
 A_3. Has the company in which you are employed quickly implemented solutions enabling remote work?
 A_4. Has the employer provided an adequate material working environment for remote work (necessary equipment, internet connection)?
 A_5. Did the employer interfere with the way employees organize their work while working remotely?
 A_6. Has the employer implemented additional forms of control related to remote work?
 A_7. Did the employer inform you about the organization's situation during the pandemic?
 A_8. Has the employer adapted the incentive package to the pandemic situation?
 A_9. Has the employer attempted to integrate people working remotely?
 A_10. Did the employer encourage its employees to be physically active?
 A_11. Did the employer provide psychosocial support to its employees during the lockdown?
 A_12. Has the organization you work for made cuts during the pandemic?
 A_13. Have there been new jobs related to work in a pandemic set up in the company you work for?

Source: own study.

Another issue addressed in the conducted study was the identification of attitudes and behaviors undertaken by employees in connection with their transition to remote work (Table 3). For this purpose 17 statements were verified.

When analyzing the obtained results, it is worth emphasizing that as many as two-thirds of the respondents had not had the opportunity to work remotely before (66.0%). This was their first experience. The indicated change did not cause significant concerns related to dismissal for most employees (71.4%). On the contrary, as many as two-thirds of generation X representatives did not feel the related stress (65.6%). It was also not reflected in the decrease in their commitment (65.2%) and work efficiency (61.4%). It is worth noting that every third respondent increased both their involvement in remote work (34.4%) and the effectiveness of its performance (34.4%).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics on the employee and their work in connection with the pandemic situation

Statement		n	%
1. Did you have the opportunity to work remotely before the COVID-19 pandemic?	Yes	79	32.8
	No	159	66.0
	I do not know	3	1.2
2. Was remote work your first job (no comparison to stationary work)?	Yes	83	51.2
	No	73	45.1
	I do not know	6	3.7
3. Did you feel more stress when working remotely than when working at the organization's headquarters?	Yes	69	28.6
	No	158	65.6
	I do not know	14	5.8
4. Were you afraid of being fired while working remotely?	Yes	58	24.1
	No	172	71.4
	I do not know	11	4.6
5. Did your immediate supervisor ask about your well-being during the lockdown?	Yes	90	37.3
	No	143	59.3
	I do not know	8	3.3
6. Did your employer require you to work specific hours?	Yes	126	52.3
	No	109	45.2
	I do not know	6	2.5
7. Have you ever dealt with private matters during the declared working time?	Yes	120	49.8
	No	114	47.3
	I do not know	7	2.9
8. Did your employer give you the freedom to organize your work?	Yes	172	71.4
	No	60	24.9
	I do not know	9	3.7
9. Did you feel more control from your employer when you switched to remote work?	Yes	54	22.4
	No	176	73.0
	I do not know	11	4.6
10. Have you looked for ways to bypass this control?	Yes	20	37.0
	No	34	63.0
	I do not know	0	0.0
11. Has your commitment/motivation to work remotely increased?	Yes	83	34.4
	No	132	54.8
	I do not know	26	10.8
12. Has your commitment/motivation to work remotely decreased?	Yes	33	20.9
	No	103	65.2
	I do not know	22	13.9

cont. Table 3

Statement	n	%
13. Has the efficiency of your remote work increased?	Yes	83 34.4
	No	114 47.3
	I do not know	44 18.3
14. Has the effectiveness of your remote work decreased?	Yes	31 19.6
	No	97 61.4
	I do not know	30 19.0
15. Has your family situation (e.g., children, animals at home etc.) reduced the effectiveness of your work?	Yes	69 28.6
	No	163 67.6
	I do not know	9 3.7
16. Has the number of household responsibilities made it difficult for you to fulfill your professional duties?	Yes	52 21.6
	No	180 74.7
	I do not know	9 3.7
17. Have the operating costs of your household related to your remote work increased?	Yes	97 40.2
	No	126 52.3
	I do not know	18 7.5

Source: own study.

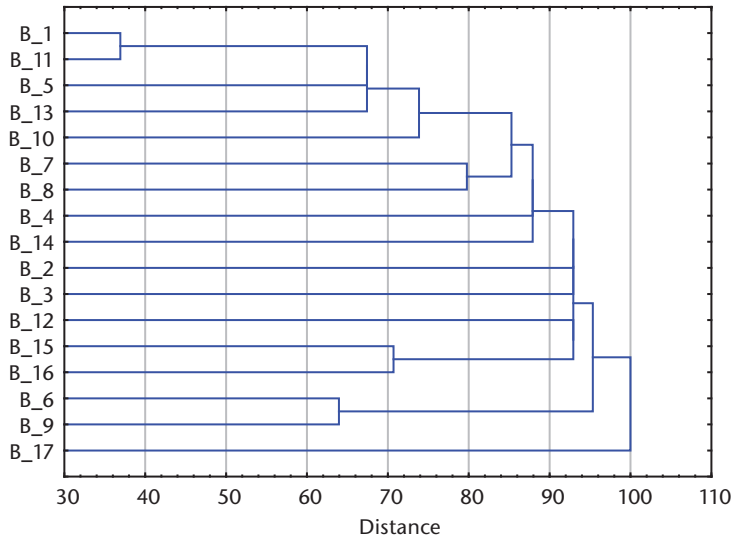
Although every second respondent's employer required work during strictly defined hours (52.3%), it was accompanied by freedom regarding its organization (71.4%). Employees did not feel increased control (73.0%), so they did not have to look for ways to "bypass" it (63.0%). Such an attitude of employers meant that nearly half of the surveyed employees could combine professional work with private matters (49.8%). For the majority of respondents, the obstacles to their home office were limited. Only 28.6% stated that the effectiveness of their work was lowered by the presence of remotely learning children, and additional household duties affected (21.6%). Analyzing the costs of operating a household during remote work, it is found that these costs increased in the opinion of two-fifths of generation X representatives.

Considering the results obtained using hierarchical cluster analysis, it was found that the most consistent responses of respondents concerned two cases (Figure 2). The first concerned the situation when the transition to remote work mode simultaneously led to an increase in their involvement. The second was when the employer required the respondents to work strictly defined hours, which made them feel more in control.

The third area analyzed was assessing employees' physical and mental health during remote work. In this aspect, 11 statements were verified (Table 4). According to the respondents, the pandemic affected their physical (42.3%) and mental (34.9%) health. This was indirectly reflected in the problems with concentration noticed by the respondents (34.4%). Against the background of the above results, two issues are

worth highlighting. First, almost every second surveyed person working remotely tried to introduce physical activity (49.0%) but did not fully care for a proper diet (27.8%). Secondly, as many as every second respondents worked despite their illness (49.8%), and more than half admitted that such situations occurred more often than during stationary work (55.0%).

Figure 2. Hierarchical cluster analysis for questions about the employee and their work in connection with their swap to remote work mode



- B_1. Did you have the opportunity to work remotely before the COVID-19 pandemic?
 B_2. Was remote work your first job (no comparison to stationary work)?
 B_3. Did you feel more stress when working remotely than when working at the organization's headquarters?
 B_4. Were you afraid of being fired while working remotely?
 B_5. Did your immediate supervisor ask about your well-being during the lockdown?
 B_6. Did your employer require you to work specific hours?
 B_7. Have you ever dealt with private matters during the declared working time?
 B_8. Did your employer give you the freedom to organize your work?
 B_9. Did you feel more control when you switched to remote work?
 B_10. Have you looked for ways to bypass this control?
 B_11. Has your commitment/motivation to work remotely increased?
 B_12. Has your commitment/motivation to work remotely decreased?
 B_13. Has the efficiency of your remote work increased?
 B_14. Has the effectiveness of your remote work decreased?
 B_15. Has your family situation (e.g., children, animals at home etc.) reduced the effectiveness of your work?
 B_16. Has the number of household responsibilities made it difficult for you to fulfill your professional duties?
 B_17. Have the operating costs of your household related to your remote work increased?

Source: own study.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics on employee health in connection with remote work during the pandemic

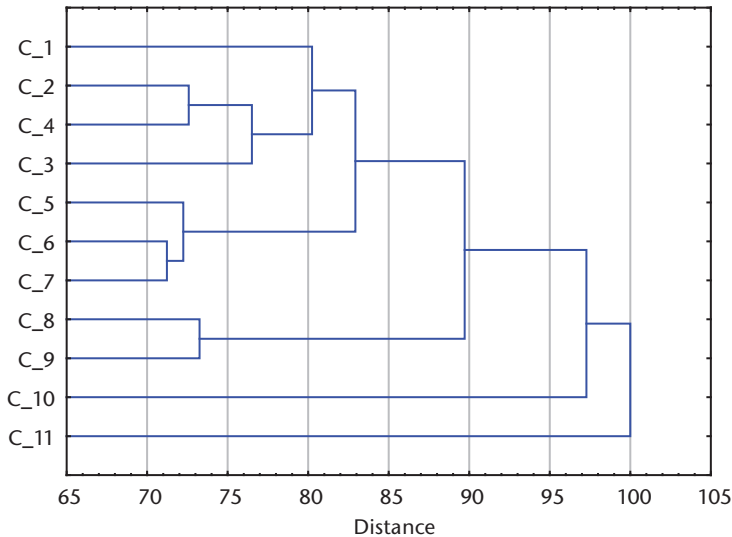
Statement		n	%
1. Have you noticed a general deterioration of your physical health while working remotely (e.g., weaker physical condition, feeling tired/weight gain)?	Yes	102	42.3
	No	128	53.1
	I do not know	11	4.6
2. Have you noticed a deterioration in your mental health while working remotely (e.g., mood swings, depression, loss of meaning in life)?	Yes	84	34.9
	No	144	59.8
	I do not know	13	5.4
3. Have you started to experience existential fear while working remotely (e.g., "what will happen to us in a month, a year")?	Yes	80	33.2
	No	145	60.2
	I do not know	16	6.6
4. Have you noticed problems with concentration and attention while working remotely?	Yes	83	34.4
	No	146	60.6
	I do not know	12	5.0
5. Did you pay attention to your clothes while working remotely?	Yes	42	17.4
	No	192	79.7
	I do not know	7	2.9
6. Have you experienced intense conflicts with people from your intimate environment while working remotely?	Yes	60	24.9
	No	167	69.3
	I do not know	14	5.8
7. Have you used stimulants more often while working remotely? (e.g., alcohol, cigarettes, etc.)	Yes	39	16.2
	No	196	81.3
	I do not know	6	2.5
8. Have you tried to introduce a well-balanced diet while working remotely?	Yes	67	27.8
	No	159	66.0
	I do not know	15	6.2
9. Have you tried to introduce physical activity while working remotely?	Yes	118	49.0
	No	116	48.1
	I do not know	7	2.9
10. Have you been working remotely despite your illness?	Yes	120	49.8
	No	108	44.8
	I do not know	13	5.4
11. Did you take up work despite illness more often than during stationary work?	Yes	66	55.0
	No	48	40.0
	I do not know	6	5.0

Source: own study.

Analyzing the obtained results using hierarchical cluster analysis, it was found that the most consistent answers of the respondents concerned:

- experiencing intensified conflicts with loved ones while reaching for stimulants.
- introduction of a balanced diet, which was associated with undertaking physical activity
- deterioration of mental health with simultaneous lack of concentration (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Hierarchical cluster analysis for questions about employee health related to their swap to remote work mode



C_1. Have you noticed a general deterioration of your physical health while working remotely (e.g., weaker physical condition, feeling tired/weight gain)?

C_2. Have you noticed a deterioration in your mental health while working remotely (e.g., mood swings, depression, loss of meaning in life)?

C_3. Have you started to experience existential fear while working remotely (e.g., "what will happen to us in a month, a year")?

C_4. Have you noticed problems with concentration and attention while working remotely?

C_5. Did you pay attention to your clothes while working remotely?

C_6. Have you experienced intense conflicts with people from your intimate environment while working remotely?

C_7. Have you used stimulants more often while working remotely? (e.g., alcohol, cigarettes, etc.)

C_8. Have you tried to introduce a well-balanced diet while working remotely?

C_9. Have you tried to introduce physical activity while working remotely?

C_10. Have you been working remotely despite your illness?

C_11. Did you take up work despite illness more often than during stationary work?

Source: own study.

The following issues analyzed concerned the respondents' indication of the advantages and disadvantages of remote work. Analyzing the results, it is concluded that employees from generation X largely perceive such a mode of work primarily through the prism of its advantages (Table 5).

Table 5. Descriptive statistics on the potential advantages of remote work

The potential advantage of working remotely	M	Me	SD
1. Development of IT competencies (use of applications for remote work, e.g., MS Teams, Zoom)	3.55	4.00	1.08
2. Saving time on commuting	4.15	4.00	1.05
3. Ability to work from anywhere	3.88	4.00	1.08
4. More effective work due to the lack of distractions	3.22	3.00	1.12
5. Lack of direct contact with co-workers, superiors, and clients	3.05	3.00	1.18
6. Greater freedom and independence at work	3.80	4.00	1.03
7. Ability to flexibly decide on working hours	3.59	4.00	1.20
8. Being able to spend more time at home	3.92	4.00	0.97
9. Ability to reconcile various activities – work, home, family, time for yourself, etc.	3.73	4.00	1.05

M – mean; Me – median; SD – standard deviation

Source: own study.

Of the nine potential advantages of remote work that were verified, most received an average weight of at least $M = 3.5$. Respondents appreciated, above all: saving time for commuting ($M = 4.15$), spending more time at home ($M = 3.92$), reconciling various activities (work, home, family, time for yourself) ($M = 3.73$), the ability to work from anywhere ($M = 3.88$), and greater freedom and independence ($M = 3.8$). Only slightly lower were given to the possibility of flexible decision-making about working hours ($M = 3.59$), development of IT competencies ($M = 3.55$), effective work related to the lack of distractions ($M = 3.22$), and lack of direct contact with colleagues ($M = 3.05$).

Table 6. Descriptive statistics on potential disadvantages of remote work

The potential disadvantage of working remotely	M	Me	SD
1. Lack of free space in the apartment/house allowing for free work	2.61	2.00	1.29
2. Internet connection instability	2.57	2.00	1.34
3. Lack of necessary tools for work (laptop, speaker, microphone, etc.)	2.30	2.00	1.23
4. Unexpected activation of the camera or microphone	2.25	2.00	1.16
5. Spending too much time in front of a computer screen	3.17	3.00	1.29
6. Less opportunity to receive support from colleagues in case of problems	3.08	3.00	1.25
7. Excessive contact from the employer regarding professional topics after working hours	2.41	2.00	1.16
8. Unscheduled assignment of additional work tasks after working hours	2.47	2.00	1.18
9. Difficulty managing your own time	2.67	3.00	1.24
10. Difficulties in reconciling professional work with home and family duties	2.70	3.00	1.23
11. Increase in costs incurred in connection with remote work	3.02	3.00	1.28
12. Unforeseen distractions (e.g., children, pets, renovations)	2.87	3.00	1.29

M – mean; Me – median; SD – standard deviation

Source: own study.

When analyzing the disadvantages of remote work indicated by the respondents, out of twelve potential disadvantages subjected to verification, they indicated only three as significant (Table 6). These were: spending too much time in front of a computer screen ($M=3.17$), limited support from colleagues ($M=3.08$), and an increase in overall home office costs ($M=3.02$). Other disadvantages are less critical for employees ($M<3$).

Conclusion

The circumstances under which employers switched to remote work were highly unfavorable. Many actions were taken quickly, and there was no time for proper preparation. Organizations coped with this task to varying degrees. The aim of the article was to explore the opinions of Generation X employees on remote work during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. According to the research, the pandemic reality created new challenges, forcing significant changes in existing personnel management practices. Based on the conducted empirical research, it has been concluded that Gen Xers have adapted well to remote work, which aligns with the general characteristics of this generation. However, it is disturbing that Gen Xers declared they were even more overworked and tired. The pandemic situation negatively affected their mental and physical well-being. Other studies confirm this finding, showing that Gen Xers suffered the most in terms of psychological well-being compared to other generations [Growth from knowledge, 2020].

As emphasized in the conducted IDIs with HR Business Partners (HR BPs), the pandemic situation negatively impacted women from generation X. Those who worked remotely felt tired of combining professional work with family and home duties, including taking on the role of their children's teachers. They noticed a decrease in motivation and commitment to work. There was a longing for interpersonal relationships, smart-casual clothes and make-up. During the pandemic, generation X continued to "live to work above all". Loyal to the employer, resistant to pressure, responsible, timely, reliable, and available to everyone "twenty-four-seven". They care about others more and too little about themselves.

Once again, Gen Xers proved they are the generation for particular tasks, used to working hard despite challenging conditions. As declared by the respondents, despite the distractors accompanying remote work, they devoted even more time to professional commitments. For most of them, work before and during the pandemic remained an autotelic value. These individuals strive to effectively perform their duties, regardless of whether they work at the company premises or at home.

It is worth emphasizing, however, that in the study conducted by the article's authors, representatives of generation X assessed the actions of companies related to the transition to remote work positively. They appreciated the ability of employers

to quickly, multidimensionally adapt to the existing situation. In their opinion, the key factors supporting this process were adapting the working environment to the new conditions, providing current information about the situation in the company, and giving employees greater flexibility in the organization of work without additional control over working time. What employees lacked the most were psychosocial support and integration and motivation activities.

This was also confirmed by the IDIs conducted with HR BPs, who indicated the most frequently reported needs and expectations by generation X employees. They highlighted the lack of: proper onboarding of new employees, which remains one of the most frequently indicated challenges faced by managers. There was also a need for clear contracts before starting remote work, appreciation of employees not just in financial aspect but also in the intangible aspect (expression of recognition, praise), care for the mental and physical well-being of employees, and assurance that everyone would survive the difficult period, encouraging self-care. HR BP also drew attention to those activities that the Xers perceived as particularly demotivating, namely: excessive contact with the employer after working hours, unplanned commissioning of additional tasks, organization of unjustified teleconferences, forcing availability during illness, too much pressure for results, and limited support when making important decisions. They also pointed to key challenges faced by organizations that could support home office employees. Although most of the respondents had a “home” space to work, in the opinion of HR BP, working in the company premises is particularly important for this generation. The possibility of using modern office space, equipped with the necessary tools for work and attachment to the dress code, is an essential element of sustaining their personal brand and prestige. They pointed out that Xers working remotely would be particularly interested in: adapting the motivation system and working methods to remote work, taking care of the right equipment, providing training aid or helpline with support, reliable communication, and ongoing feedback regarding the current situation of the company. Continuing the same tasks, events, and meetings that took place before COVID, building a culture of trust, focusing more on operational activities, and clearly defining goals and their monitoring are also crucial.

Both employers and employees ask themselves: Which changes introduced due to the COVID-19 pandemic will last longer, and how will the further adaptation process to remote work proceed? The latest changes to the Labor Code confirm that remote work is going to continue. It responds to the needs and expectations of both employers and employees. According to the research results, employees from generation X coped very well in remote working conditions. Many will want to use this form of work organization to a greater or lesser extent in the future. To work effectively, they need recognition of their needs, adequate and genuine support from their superiors, and appreciation for the results of their work.

The authors intend to continue their research on the indicated topic and the adaptability to remote work of employees from other generations present in the labor market, especially the Y and BB generations. Due to the limitations of the research sample, it is essential to underline that generalizing the research results must be done with caution.

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GEN XERS IN UNCERTAIN TIME OF WORKING REMOTELY – AN EMPLOYEE’S PERSPECTIVE

Abstract

The main goal of the paper is to explore the opinions of Generation X employees on remote work during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. A quantitative research method was used, specifically a diagnostic survey using the surveying technique and CAWI methods. The original questionnaire was based on two measurement scales: ordinal (Likert scale) and nominal (binary and categorical). The survey ended with a metric that enabled the collection of the socio-demographic characteristics of the studied population. Subsequently, a two-way data analysis method was applied as part of the adopted research methodology. Due to the nominal nature of the variables, frequency and percentage statistics were used in the statistical evaluation. For variables on the Likert scale, measures of descriptive statistics were used. Correctly completed questionnaires by 241 respondents were qualified for the final analysis.

Research shows that the pandemic reality has created new challenges, forcing significant changes in personnel management practices. The obtained results made it possible to conclude that Gen X workers were highly involved in their workplace while working remotely. Unfortunately, they were also overworked and tired. Gen Xers strive to effectively perform their duties, regardless of whether they work at the company’s headquarters or at home.

Due to the limitations of the research sample, it is essential to underline that generalizing the research results must be done with caution.

Originality/value – Our paper contributes to the latest insight into remote work from the perspective of Gen Xers during the pandemic. The authors of this article recognize that it would be worthwhile to conduct the study over a longer period, which would allow for identifying the level of adaptation to remote work.

KEYWORDS: GENERATION X, EMPLOYER, REMOTE WORK, PANDEMIC

JEL CLASSIFICATION CODES: J24, J81, M12, M54

POKOLENIE X W NIEPEWNYCH CZASACH PODCZAS PRACY ZDALNEJ – PERSPEKTYWA PRACOWNIKA

Streszczenie

Głównym celem artykułu jest eksploracja opinii pracowników, będących przedstawicielami pokolenia X, w zakresie pracy zdalnej podczas pandemii COVID-19. Zastosowano ilościową metodę badawczą z wykorzystaniem metod CAWI. Autorski kwestionariusz opierał się na dwóch skalach pomiarowych: porządkowej na skali Likerta oraz nominalnej (binarnej i kategoriowej). Próba została zróżnicowana ze względu na płeć, branżę przedsiębiorstwa, miejsce zamieszkania oraz posiadanie dzieci, co umożliwiło przeprowadzenie charakterystyki społeczno-demograficznej badanej populacji. Następnie w ramach przyjętej metodyki badawczej wykorzystano metodę dwukierunkowej analizy danych. Ze względu na nominalny charakter zmiennych w ocenie statystycznej wykorzystano statystyki częstościowe i procentowe. Dla zmiennych ze skali Likerta zastosowano miary statystyki opisowej. Do ostatecznej analizy zakwalifikowano 241 ankiet. Z badań wynika, że pandemiczna rzeczywistość stworzyła nowe wyzwania, wymuszając na pracodawcach zmiany w stosowanych do tej pory praktykach zarządzania personelem. Uzyskane wyniki pozwoliły stwierdzić, że przedstawiciele pokolenia X dążą do efektywnego wykonywania swoich obowiązków, niezależnie od tego, czy pracują w siedzibie firmy, czy w domu. Ze względu na ograniczenia próby badawczej należy podkreślić, że uogólniania wyników badań należy dokonać ostrożnie. Artykuł stanowi wkład w spojrzenie na pracę zdalną z perspektywy pokolenia X podczas pandemii. Autorki artykułu uważają, że wartościowych wniosków mogłoby dostarczyć przeprowadzenie badania o charakterze longitudinalnym. Dałoby ono możliwość obserwacji badanych pracowników na przestrzeni czasu, co pozwoliłoby na określenie ich poziomu przystosowania do pracy zdalnej.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: POKOLENIE X, PRACODAWCA, PRACA ZDALNA, PANDEMIA

KODY KLASYFIKACJI JEL: J24, J81, M12, M54