

# ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT FOR REMOTE WORKERS IN EXTREME SITUATIONS: THEORETICAL INSIGHTS

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**Abstract.** Due to extreme situations caused by natural, technical, ecological, or social reasons or acts of war, to ensure the continuity of operations, organizations must adapt to new changes related to changed working conditions, when direct contact with people is avoided and a form of remote work is switched to. This means that at such a time, organizations must reorganize work processes and provide support to employees to ensure the successful implementation of remote work. For organizations seeking to ensure the productive work of employees remotely, technology alone is not enough, they need appropriate employee qualifications, motivation, and organizational support, which plays an important role in shaping employee job satisfaction.

**Keywords:** organizational support, remote work, extreme situation

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## INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic, which unexpectedly hit the world more than three years ago, changed the nature of work - the form of remote work, which is the most recommended during an emergency, was mandatory, at the request of state authorities, to protect against the spread of the virus. Thus, at an extreme moment, organizations had to reorganize work processes and provide support to employees to ensure the successful implementation of remote work to remain competitive in the market.

Although organizational support is considered one of the success factors in the implementation of remote work (Allen, Golden and Shockley, 2015), it should be noted that the aspects of organizational support for employees in the context of remote work are not particularly widely analyzed by both foreign and Lithuanian researchers. Proponents of organizational support theory treat organizational support as the organization's concern for the well-being of employees (Collins, Hislop & Cartwright, 2016) and note that organizational support determines employee job satisfaction and increases work productivity (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). Therefore, in order to ensure the job satisfaction of telecommuters, according to Bentley et al. (2016), the employee needs all kinds of support from the organization, which will allow him to satisfy security and social-emotional needs, such as recognition, and self-confidence. After analyzing the scientific literature (Bosua, Gloet, Kurnia, Mendoza, & Yong, 2013; Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008; Collins et al., 2016; Cooper & Kurland, 2002; Golden & Viega, 2005; Smith, Patmos, & Pitts, 2015), it was noted that before the COVID-19 pandemic, the studies on employee job satisfaction in the context of remote work were focused on voluntary remote workers, and the forms of support for remote work and their impact on employee job satisfaction were studied fragmentarily. The contribution of Lithuanian scientists to this field is much more modest: Tamašauskaitė (2013) identifies features that are characteristic of remote work regulation according to labor law; Nakrošienė and Butkevičienė (2016) discuss the features, advantages, and challenges of remote work; Nakrošienė, Bučiūnienė and Goštautaitė (2019) identify the features of remote work from home. Thus, there is a lack of scientific works that would analyze the issues of support for remote workers in extreme situations.

The purpose of this article is to reveal the theoretical insights of the organization's support for remote employees in extreme situations.

## THE CONCEPT OF ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT

The construct of *Perceived Organizational Support* takes an important place in the modern literature of management and organizational psychology. Based on social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), organizational support theory states that by providing resources to employees, it motivates employees to help the organization achieve its goals when both the social and emotional needs of employees are met (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). According to Eisenberger and Stinglhamber (2011), social exchange and self-improvement in the workplace are mutually beneficial for both the organization and the employee. Employees' behavior is determined by the environment, they are not interested in internal cognitive events. Behavior is controlled only by supportive factors that increase the likelihood that the act will be repeated if an immediate outcome is assessed. Support theory ignores the internal state of the individual and focuses on what happens to the person when he takes some action (Dubauskas, 2006).

Proponents of organizational support theory explain organizational support as the organization's concern for the well-being of employees and the evaluation of their work. It is worth noting that perceived organizational support is an individual-level construct that captures individual employees' subjective perceptions of how they are cared for and valued by the organization (Swift and Virick, 2013). Bentley et al. (2016) believe that organizational support has a significant impact on employees' job satisfaction, commitment and loyalty to the organization and the proper maintenance

of the microclimate. This confirms that support theory is guided by a behavioral approach, proving that organizational support determines employee behavior - employees cope better with daily tasks and experience less stress (Thakur & Kumar, 2015), all of which leads to employee job satisfaction and commitment to the organization.

Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) highlight the following key aspects that increase employees' perceived organizational support:

- *equity*, which refers to the fair distribution of organizational resources to employees. It makes employees feel that the organization cares about their well-being. This justice includes social and structural justice. Structural justice includes the formal rules and policies of the organization and reflects their evaluation - the fairness of working hours, the remuneration received by the employee in comparison with other employees of the organization (social justice);

- *manager's support*, which includes employees' evaluation of their manager's contribution to their well-being. The manager is responsible for organizing the organization's activities and evaluating subordinates. According to Johnson (2019), it is important for a manager to know what their employees are doing, and when working remotely, this becomes more difficult, because the manager does not have the opportunity to meet with employees at their workplace and ask what their situation is, if they are facing any problems. If managers blindly rely on information provided by employees through digital channels such as email and video chat platforms, they can easily be misled. Therefore, managers should make more efforts in communicating with their team members and take the initiative to communicate with them frequently to encourage communication with each other and with the managers themselves (Johnson, 2019). According to Orsini and Rodrigues (2020), managers play an important role in ensuring that employees remain motivated regardless of where people work and whether they work alone and communicate with colleagues only by phone, email, and video chat. Studies conducted by researchers have also shown that managers who foster a needs-supportive approach strengthen employee motivation and achieve better results and stronger job satisfaction. The best way managers can support remote workers is to foster close relationships and open communication, give people autonomy and show trust in them, but at the same time set clear guidelines so that they feel organized and work effectively (Orsini & Rodrigues, 2020). Managers could set clear guidelines for remote work, and it's better to over-communicate rather than under-communicate to keep employees connected. Employees evaluate the manager's actions as "pleasant" and "unpleasant", this is treated as organizational support;

- *working conditions and organizational incentives*. Good human resources practices show that employee recognition, a fair reward system, employee promotion, workplace and safety, and organized training are factors that determine greater perceived organizational support. According to Van der Lippe and Lippényi (2020), working from home can lead to social and professional isolation, which hinders knowledge sharing and undermines job prospects. Such a situation, according to the authors, can be mitigated by effective management strategies. Using the right platforms that facilitate collaboration and knowledge sharing can help optimize the work of teams with many remote workers. Nijp, Beckers van de Voorde, Geurts and Kompier (2016) state that the use of information and communication technologies creates conditions for social communication and establishing connections, helps to avoid psychological isolation and maintain high-quality social functioning and relationships of employees.

Meanwhile, Karanik and Cauchi (2020) analysed organizational support for remote workers, and emphasized that remote work should not be taken for granted, but rather as a work arrangement between employer and employee where mutual benefits are obtained. The authors identify the following strategic directions of organizational support:

- remote work programs must be carefully designed, described and approved by employees, rather than simply assumed to be appropriate; work-from-home agreements must be formalized and adhered to;

- managers must ensure effective communication between those working remotely and those working in offices, including informing those working from home about all the news of the organization;

- the discipline of discussions must be ensured, especially when holding meetings remotely. Appropriate agreements should be drawn up and approved prior to meetings to ensure smooth communication and effective time management;

- managers must inform office workers about remote workers' work schedules and contact information on how to contact them;

- managers must suggest and perhaps somewhat influence decisions on how work will be done at home, as well as provide equipment, recommend a suitable space;

- guidelines are needed to establish regular communication between remote workers and those in the office to ensure that such communication does not become a burden on remote workers;

- organizational administrators must be prepared to implement remote work programs, particularly in terms of expectations, monitoring, supervision, performance measurement and evaluation;

- reserve systems must be prepared in case of technological failures.

However, successful remote work is not possible without the efforts of employees. Fan, Zhao, Bin, Chen, Wang, Song, & Yi, H. (2020) note that managers planning for telecommuting should encourage employees to create an ergonomic workplace at home; follow routines and maintain boundaries between "work" and "home" space; stay social, as socializing with colleagues reduces stress. In addition, the authors draw attention to the fact that managers must also take care of the well-being of their employees because the well-being of employees can reduce the number of absenteeism and increase work engagement and operational efficiency. Investments in technology, such as messaging and video and voice calling platforms, can help keep teams connected, the authors say. It is important to invest in a recognition platform that allows employees to receive feedback.

Organizational support theory allows us to state that the goal of organizational support is to take care of the well-being of employees, ensuring the provision of the necessary equipment and meeting the social and emotional needs of employees, thus achieving the goals of the organization, creating mutual benefits for both the organization and the employee, working both in a physical workplace and in a flexible form of work, i.e. remotely.

## **FORMS OF ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT FOR EMPLOYEES WORKING REMOTELY**

Economic, social, and technological changes and today's challenges, such as the disappearance of borders between countries, labour migration, the increasing value of intellectual work, as well as extreme situations, such as a pandemic, quarantine, the presence of war, change working conditions and labor relations. Rapid development of modern technologies allows working remotely from home. However, as pointed out by Collins et al. (2016), in order for an employee to feel job satisfaction while working remotely, organizational support is necessary, which in the scientific literature is understood as the organization's concern for the well-being of employees.

Kowalski and Swanson (2005) identify the following success factors for remote working:

- support from all levels of management, especially the line manager;
- technological assistance and provision of necessary tools and equipment, training on how to use them;
- communication and relationships based on mutual trust between employees.

Although the analysis of research sources (Chiaburu and Harrison, 2008; Collins et al., 2016; Bentley et al., 2016; Kim and Wang, 2018) shows that employee relationships with customers, co-workers, and managers are important for work productivity, it is still necessary to note that there is little research that focuses on social support for those employees who work remotely. Remote work can negatively affect work relationships with supervisors and colleagues, as well as lead to an "us and them" cultural division. According to researchers, as the social support of employees increases, the psychological stress experienced by the employees during remote work decreases. However, as shown by research conducted by researchers, organizational support includes not only helping employees in performing activities but also focusing on providing emotional support to the employee, which increases employee job satisfaction.

Jolly, Kong, and Kim (2021) suggest categorizing social support by form, content (type), and source. First, the form of social support is treated as an employee's behaviour or perception of the provision or use of social support, or the perceived availability or receipt of social support. Research has revealed a gap between employees' actual use of support and their perception of the availability of support. Second, according to the authors, social support differs according to its content (type). House (1981) distinguishes four main types of social support:

- *emotional support* (psychosocial support such as empathy, caring for the employee, providing sympathy, listening to employees' problems, helping them find a solution);
- *instrumental support* (providing the resources necessary to perform the work);
- *informational support* (providing information based on the employee's needs);
- *appraisal support* (providing specific information about the employee's activities, his behaviour, which allows to evaluate his work).

Sias (2009) agrees with the opinion of House (1981) and also distinguishes emotional, informational and instrumental support as the main types of social support for employees.

*Social support* can come from supervisors, co-workers, family, and community members, but the impact of this support on work productivity may vary depending on the type of source (Tews, Michel, & Stafford, 2020). Remote work becomes a considerable challenge for managers since this form of work is much more complicated compared to the traditional form of work organization. Both more than a decade ago and in recent years, studies conducted by researchers (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Marescaux, Rofcanin, Las Heras, Ilies, & Bosch, 2020) have revealed that the positive attitude of the head of the organization, the immediate supervisor towards remote work and the support provided by him to the employee is an essential factor in the implementation of remote work in the organization. It is managers who encourage or limit employees' ability to focus on their work and better manage their personal needs. It is noted in the scientific literature that managers who help their employees find ways and means to balance work and personal life create a positive attitude of employees toward work and promote better work results (Talukder, Vickers and Khan, 2018). On the other hand, employees who perceive that their manager cares about their well-being and personal/family life also feel the need to reciprocate and help the manager achieve the organization's goals by improving its performance (Rofcanin, Las Heras, Escribano, & Stanko, 2020). In the context of remote work, where the boundary between work and personal life is disappearing, according to scientists (de Valdenebro Campo, Avolio, and Carlier, 2021; Straub, Beham and Islam, 2019), family-supportive managerial behaviour helps employees manage work and family responsibilities, thereby increasing employee energy, enthusiasm, and positive mood at work. Recent research carried out by Rofcanin et al. (2020) confirms that there is a positive relationship between family-supportive managerial behaviour and employee job satisfaction.

Although Madsen (2011) expresses the idea that remote work is focused on experienced, disciplined, motivated, and self-confident workers who do not need constant communication with colleagues, work supervision, and coordination, Toscano and Zappala (2020) note that in the remote work environment, both physical and informational isolation harm employee job satisfaction, which can affect the employee's emotional well-being. In this case, according

to the researchers, not only the manager's support but also the co-workers' support is important for remote workers, i.e. trust is expressed, which according to Bulinska-Stangrecka and Bagienska (2021) is an indicator of positive employee attitudes and behavior. Their research results show that mutual trust among employees has a positive effect on organizational performance, strengthens employee cooperation, reduces employee stress, and increases resistance to change. In addition, according to the authors, trust activates the learning process by creating social relationships using different communication channels and increases job satisfaction. This is also confirmed by Raišienė (2012), who claims that communication through electronic means and technological channels is significant when working in virtual groups. The research carried out by the author showed that the role of electronic communication in the efficiency of employees' activities and the success of organizations is ambiguous. Compared to the technological one, direct communication should be prioritized to achieve organizational efficiency. It should be noted that technological channels partially limit some communication possibilities, for example, electronic communication is not suitable for developing informal employee contacts, strengthening employee commitment, and making significant decisions in groups. It is important to understand that the electronic medium does not in itself improve communication. Whether electronic communication will be of high quality or not depends mostly on the personal motivation of the contacts and the real need to use technology. Therefore, to achieve organizational efficiency, according to Raišienė (2012), it is necessary to use the widest possible range of communication channels, as well as to promote direct informal communication of employees, which, according to Fay (2011), reduces the feeling of isolation of remote employees.

Moynihan and Pandey (2008) argue that employees are part of an organization's internal social networks in which each of them influences the other's attitudes and behaviors. Therefore, when examining the experience of remote workers in the context of social support, it is important to consider the interaction of all workers involved in these networks – how individual remote workers interact with other remote workers, managers, and office colleagues. Collins et al. (2016) (2016) conducted a qualitative study in a public sector organization and found that remote work allowed people to distance themselves from negative or irrelevant work relationships while developing positive relationships, mostly with other remote coworkers. Remote work thus allowed people to avoid groups with which they did not identify and strengthen relationships with those they valued and closely identified with. Thus, it can be assumed that greater social support from managers and co-workers in a remote work environment allows for a better emotional state of employees and greater job satisfaction.

*Employee support, performance evaluation, and recognition* are other important forms of organizational support in the context of both remote and traditional work, which can influence employee job satisfaction and commitment to the organization (Landis, Vick, Novo, 2015). According to Šorytė and Pajarskienė (2014), to ensure that employees feel satisfied with their work, it is necessary to ensure such conditions as a safe working environment, opportunities to combine work and family needs, good relations with colleagues and managers, recognition and involvement of employees in solving the most important issues of the organization. Allen et al. (2015) assert that in order to facilitate the organization of remote work, it is necessary to ensure a supportive work environment that "normalizes" remote work and allows to use of the benefits provided by such a work mode. Wheatley (2017) says that remote workers need to be carefully controlled to avoid the anger of people working in offices: they may feel burdened with additional duties or tasks because their colleagues are not "visible" in the office. However, this idea is contradicted by Mautz (2019) who states that instead of trying to control and track every move and time of employees, managers could trust them more and focus on the results they achieve. For this reason, it is very important to define each person's roles, work tasks, rewards, and responsibilities and to communicate results-oriented performance evaluation clearly and objectively. Bernardino, Déa Roglio, and Corso (2012) note that employee performance evaluation and recognition are critical in teleworking, as face-to-face communication is limited. Performance appraisal provides feedback to the employee about his performance. According to MacDuffie (2007), in virtual teams, where there is a lack of "face-to-face" communication, feedback should be provided periodically, because the lack of feedback can harm employee motivation, work productivity, and final work results. To ensure feedback when creating a productive culture of communication and cooperation in the organization, according to Mautz (2019), it is necessary to combine various information technology tools (e-mails, virtual meetings, SMS, etc.), because virtual relations with employees and mutual trust are the basis employee job satisfaction.

Anand (2020) analyzed remote work and its related issues during the Covid-19 pandemic. The author emphasizes that during a health crisis, organizations must pay attention to the stress experienced by employees and be open by offering employees appropriate communication channels (e.g. messaging platforms, video conferences, e-mails) through which important work issues can be discussed and resolved, organize virtual seminars, new skills development sessions, virtual counseling and training sessions to help employees stay safe and healthy at home, remind colleagues to take extra precautions for potential data breaches and other cybersecurity issues and encourage employees to share work experiences and tips. In this difficult period, according to the scientist, evaluation, recognition, and encouragement of employees is necessary. Meanwhile, Metts (2020) notes that to maintain a high level of organizational morale, it is necessary to develop an employee engagement and communication plan for employees to communicate and maintain relationships while working remotely. Employee engagement should not be a one-off implementation but should be integrated into the company's culture. According to Patro (2013), employee engagement, enthusiasm, and job satisfaction are stimulated by factors such as career development prospects, promotion, communication, recognition, flexibility of employee working hours, fair salary structure, transparent and open work environment, and participation in decision-making.



A person feels motivated to work more when his work is appreciated by managers. The researchers found that although remote workers had more flexibility and autonomy compared to workers performing work activities in a traditional workspace, they had fewer opportunities to engage in work, as a result of which they experienced greater professional isolation - fewer opportunities for promotion, salary increases, personal development, career (Morganson, Major, Oborn, Verive, & Heelan, 2010). Bernardino et al. (2012) assert that (2012) emphasize that special attention must be paid to employee training in the remote work process. Knowledge and application of information technology, and remote work programs is one of the factors to successfully organize remote work. The authors note that training for managers should focus on the ability to manage virtual teams and include aspects such as improving communication, defining goals, and evaluating employees based on their performance. Investing in employee training and development can increase employer trust when the telecommuter recognizes that the organization is investing in his or her professional development. A study by Oubibi, Fute, Xiao, Sun, and Zhou (2022) on the effect of educational organizational support on the job satisfaction of Chinese teachers found that employees who perceive higher levels of organizational support are more satisfied with their careers, and therefore more creative, more engaged, and at work feel more satisfied.

Another type of organizational support that is discussed in the works of researchers is *technical support*. According to Bosua et al. (2013), the main purpose of this type of support is to ensure effective coordination of employees with the organization and co-workers. The more employees in an organization work remotely, the more relevant this support for employees is in terms of technology and training. According to Bayrak (2012), the more there is individual remote work, the higher the need for technology and training related to the application of technology in remote work. Therefore, according to Bosua et al. (2013), in this context the role of technical support becomes important, the task of which is to ensure effective coordination of workers with the main workplace and co-workers. Bentley et al., (2016) assert that as a result, remote work is expected to increase organizational social and technological support, leading to higher employee satisfaction with telecommuting, as support for telecommuting technology and communication reduces employee stress and strain.

Thus, the success of remote work becomes the guarantee of empathy and care-based interaction between managers and employees, which creates a positive work environment; providing the employee with relevant information on personal life and work issues; provision of necessary work resources and tools, and support for the professional and personal development of the employee.

## CONCLUSIONS

1. The analysis of the scientific literature allows us to define organizational support as caring for the well-being of employees and evaluating their work. The main factors determining the level of support perceived by the employee, which influences the employee's job satisfaction, are the recognition of employees, the support of the manager, the workplace and safety, the opportunity to learn and advance in the career ladder, and the fair reward system.

2. The analysis of scientific literature revealed that in the context of remote work, the emotional support of the manager and colleagues, informational support, which is related to the provision of relevant information to the employee on personal life and work issues, and support for the professional and personal development of the employee play a special role. However, a prerequisite for successful remote work is instrumental support, which is not possible without the organization's investment in technology (internet access, smartphone, computer) and other resources necessary to perform remote work.

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