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Training and Development Processes in Polish Companies during and after the COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The purpose of this paper is to verify and determine changes in training and development processes regarding the COVID-19 pandemic in Polish companies.

Research Design & Methods: The research was conducted in 100 companies using CAWI and was addressed to human resource (HR) specialists, mainly in large companies from a diverse range of sectors, mainly in manufacturing, public sector, ICT, and transport. The tailored questionnaire consisted of 62 statements addressing the following dimensions: training and development (T&D) policy, organisational expectations, procedures of preparation, implementation and monitoring of T&D, participants, evaluation, and financing and investment in T&D. The theoretical base of the paper is human resource development (HRD) theory.

Findings: The results indicate several changes made by organisations as a result of the pandemic, some of which were only temporary, while others became a permanent feature of T&D policies. Generally, Polish companies managed to adapt to the environmental changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic to the satisfaction of both employees and employers.
Implications/Recommendations: Results of the research can be used to improve training and development programmes offered by companies to increase employees' skills, knowledge, and attitudes in the workplace. They could also help to adjust the training to the new situation and conditions in the post-pandemic period. Finally, they can serve institutions responsible for policy provision of HRD at a national level to provide possibilities to apply for funding for T&D activities.
Contribution: No detailed quantitative study has been done so far to analyse if and how training and development activities have changed over the past few years, especially in the Polish business environment.

Article type: original article.

Keywords: training and development, human resources, HRD, quantitative research, COVID-19.

JEL Classification: O15, J24, E24, M53.

1. Introduction

From 2020 to 2022, the world lived under the constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic. Following the "presence-based old normal", we were all driven into a "remote new normal" (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). From 2022 a hybrid form of "renewed normal" has been present with a mix of "the best of two worlds" (Hamouche & Chabani, 2021). Digital transformation processes were crucial in this socio-economic context because they could enable and facilitate many operations in the working environment, which required new strategies approaches, especially in the area of education (Tomé & Gromova, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic changed the reality of work, which meant a change in the required competencies, which influenced the whole hierarchy of skills (Belachew & Surkin, 2020; Tome & Costa, 2022).

The organisation of work processes and employee development changed dramatically due to the pandemic; however, there is still a lack of empirical studies on how the COVID-19 pandemic influenced training and development (T&D) in particular countries. Therefore, a research gap exists. In consequence, this paper aims to examine training and development processes related to the COVID-19 pandemic in companies in Poland, with a particular emphasis on changes in T&D activities which were applied as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic; relationships between particular elements of the organisation of T&D activities together with the way they correlate with each other, and the differences between companies in terms of implementing or managing T&D activities.

In order to achieve this descriptive goal, the paper is organised into four sections. The first section describes the theoretical background ending with the research questions. The second part presents the research methodology. The third section focuses on the results and the discussion of the results and their potential implications. The fourth section contains the final conclusions and ideas for further research.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Concept of HRD

The concept of human resource development (HRD) has been approached differently by many scholars. Some define it in a broad way in which HRD includes all the efforts made and work done by society to develop and train human resources (HR) (Black, Hashimzade & Myle, 2017). This embraces areas such as basic education, secondary education, and vocational schooling, together with science and research. Organisations such as the World Bank, the United Nations, and the OECD sometimes use this concept (Tracz-Krupa & Tomé, 2019). Although not everyone agrees on the definitive boundaries of HRD within HR, most HRD scholars agree on the following three central components of HRD: organisation development, career development, and training and development (Swanson & Holton, 2009). There are also other scholars who define HRD (McGuire & Cseh, 2006; Gibb, 2008; Swanson & Holton, 2009) and T&D (Massey, 2004) as activities offered by companies with the intention and willingness to balance the benefits for both the employee and the organisation (c.f. Tracz-Krupa & Tomé, 2019; Juchnowicz & Kinowska, 2022). Training and employee development is understood as "a process of developing and unleashing human expertise through organisational development and personnel training and development for the purpose of improving performance" (Swanson & Holton, 2009, p. 8).

Training and employee development are activities about which traditional economic thought and sociological theory have different ideas. On the one hand, training is seen as a basic requirement for an enterprise. On the other hand, the characteristics of training vary. Companies need to find employees with the required formal qualifications, but because each organisation creates a very specific environment, employees end up with tacit knowledge acquired through on-the-job practices, which is extremely valuable. The basic theory defines a two-tier training and labour market of dual configuration in which big organisations provide training and develop careers in some form of oligopsony, whereas small companies survive in an almost perfectly competitive segment of the market. The problem with this second segment is that training opportunities for career development and rewards are fewer.

2.2. Training and Development in Companies – Assessment

Nolan and Garavan (2016) carried out a systematic review of the literature on training and employee development since 1994, which finally included 117 publications. There were 11 theoretical papers, 44 quantitative studies, 35 used mixed method studies, and 27 were qualitative articles. The authors reached the following conclusions: 1) training and employee development was not defined as such by the majority of scholars but instead, they used the following terms separately: "training", "development", "competence development", "learning", "formal job-related training", "informal training", "management training and development"; 2) studies were focused on the following areas, employee development practices, system or architecture, climate, and also the problems which prompted interventions; 3) organisational results analyses come to a greater extent from formal rather than informal training, and authors mostly use perceptual measures of impact; in relation to sales/employment growth, competitiveness, and business development, it is difficult to establish statistically significant outcomes and cause-effect correlations (Tracz-Krupa & Tomé, 2019).

Training and development may have a positive impact on the companies in areas such as job satisfaction and employee motivation (Huang, 2001; Pajo, Coetzer & Guenole, 2010), mentoring and personal development, as well as the development of appraisal systems and performance management (Devins & Johnson, 2002; Smith *et al*., 2002), quality of working life, organisational commitment and employee self-confidence (Rowden, 1995, 2002; Roffe, 2007) and also strategic management, business development, marketing, and HRM (Wightman & McAleer, 1995; Marlow, 1998; Devins & Gold, 2002; Patton & Marlow, 2002; Massey, 2004; Walker *et al*., 2007; Tracz-Krupa & Tomé, 2019).

In the literature on the subject, one can find several studies about factors that favour the existence of employee development practices: the CEO approach (Shin, Park & Lim, 2013) facilitating self-managed work teams (Fazzari & Mosca, 2009), social capital and innovation capital, social interaction within company, culture in a working environment, networks, and the strength of bonds among the employees (Kamaluddin *et al*., 2016; Tracz-Krupa & Tomé, 2019; Andrzejczak, 2021).

2.3. Previous Studies on Training and Development in COVID-19 Pandemic

There have been several studies of different aspects of T&D with both narrower and broader perspectives (HRD) during the COVID-19 pandemic in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). Mikołajczyk (2022) analysed changes in the approach of Polish organisations to employee development that have occurred as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic by interviewing HR managers. She indicated that apart from the changes in the form and methodology of employee training

due to the pandemic, employees also desire new subjects to assist their development. She also noticed that, mainly due to the fact that remote cooperation was more cognitively burdensome than direct cooperation, employees experienced more fatigue and stress during online meetings compared to the situation before the pandemic. Her research showed that lower employee engagement and increased fatigue were linked to the use of multiple online development initiatives (Mikołajczyk, 2022). Klementová and Procházková (2021) analysed sources of finance for corporate education in the Czech Republic during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021 and compared them with conditions in 2016. They concluded that companies rely mainly on their own sources of finance when funding the training and development of their employees and that there are still large reserves available in funds from programmes, grants, and subsidies. They demonstrated that during the pandemic the use of public and EU money for adult education was limited because of various restrictions. Túri and Virág (2021) compared the Visegrad experience in HR management during the pandemic with the successful case of South Korea. Urbancová *et al*. (2021) discussed the question of agricultural companies in the Czech Republic. Also, the Czech Republic addressed the problem of effective training evaluation. They proved that the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the digitisation and exploitation of innovation in evaluating employee training and development. In their opinion, systematic processes of evaluating the effectiveness of employee training during the pandemic depended on the business sector, on the fact that the organisation was, or was not, a part of a larger group, on (non)existence of an HR department, and on the size of the organisation (Urbancová *et al*., 2021). Additionally, Čemerková, Pokorná and Malátek (2022) analysed reinvestment activities of companies aimed at supporting employee education and training in the Czech Republic in the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. They proved that the share of companies that reinvested their profits did not significantly change due to the first wave of the COVID-19 crisis in the Czech Republic. However, under the influence of the crisis, companies increased their reinvestment activity and thus used the resulting crises as investment and reinvestment opportunities. Before the COVID-19 crisis, a total of 37.75% of companies reinvested up to 20% of their profits. After the first wave of the crisis, the number of companies investing in this way fell to 25.98% (Čemerková, Pokorná & Malátek, 2022).

There are also articles about HRM practices or adult education which touch upon T&D during the COVID-19 pandemic in CEE (see e.g. Krasnova, 2021; Slavić *et al*., 2021; Veteška & Kursch, 2021), however, there was no paper dedicated to T&D during the COVID-19 pandemic which used a detailed questionnaire embracing all of the elements of T&D as a process in a single CEE country. In this paper quantitative methods were used, addressing 12 dimensions of T&D processes assessed by practitioners. This makes it innovative and very relevant.

The aim of the conducted study is rather descriptive than explanatory, which requires posing general research questions. Hence, it covers three research questions:

1. What changes in T&D activities were applied as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and which of them were permanent?

2. What are the relationships between particular elements/parts of T&D activities? Do they correlate positively or negatively?

3. Are there any differences between companies in terms of implementing or managing T&D activities? If yes, in what part of T&D processes do they occur?

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Tools

The method used in this research was a tailored survey addressed to staff responsible for training and development. Its main aim was to systematically investigate the changes in T&D activities implemented due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The questionnaire, consisting of 62 items, was designed on the basis of a T&D theoretical framework describing the following steps of managing and implementing such activities. Statements about policies and T&D goals were delivered first, e.g. "My company has training and development (T&D) policy", and "COVID-19 pandemic has caused new challenges in the area of T&D activities". The second part consisted of statements describing the implementation processes of T&D and changes to them due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some examples of those statements are as follows: "Topics of T&D activities have significantly changed because of the COVID-19 pandemic", "The preparation phase of T&D activities has become more difficult because of the COVID-19 pandemic", or, "New ways of implementing T&D activities have been used during the COVID-19 pandemic". The next part was devoted to the description of trainers and trainees, e.g.: "The number of trainees has increased since the COVID-19 pandemic", or "The types of trainer have become more diverse since the COVID-19 pandemic". Finally, the last sector of the questionnaire was based on establishing evaluation and control processes for T&D. Examples of statements are as follows: "My company evaluates T&D activities thoroughly", "New ways of auditing T&D activities have been used during the COVID-19 pandemic", and "My company's expenditures on T&D have increased during the COVID-19 pandemic". All statements were assessed by three independent experts in the T&D area in order to provide the most comprehensive application of the established theoretical framework, as well as to make the questionnaire intelligible to respondents. The number of particular items in each part was as follows:

– policy of T&D – 4 items,

– expectations towards T&D activities – 6 items,

– procedures of diagnosis of T&D – 6 items,
– description of the preparation phase of T&D activities – 5 items,
– description of implementation procedures of T&D activities – 7 items,
– description of the process of monitoring T&D activities – 7 items,
– characteristics of trainees – 4 items, and trainers – 4 items,
– investment in and expenditure on T&D – 4 items,
– description of evaluation of T&D activities – 8 items,
– description of results of T&D activities – 1 item consisting of 11 possible answers,
– description of financial controlling of T&D activities – 6 items.

Each item had six answer categories from 1 – definitely disagree, to 6 – definitely agree (except for two items in which respondents chose the most significant/frequent answer).

Additionally, five demographic items were added, providing the age of the respondent, tenure with the company, both overall and in the current position, job title/current position, and department. Three additional items were devoted to establishing characteristics of the respondent's company – size, type, and sector (according to NACE).

3.2. Procedure

Questionnaires were distributed to 100 companies in Poland. A professional research institution conducted the distribution of the questionnaires. The CAWI technique was used, and an online link to the survey was provided. The certified research institution selected by our University for long-term collaboration distributed the surveys to strictly defined respondents – staff responsible for training and development initiatives and human resources activities. A comprehensive respondent database, including several thousand establishments, allowed the research institution to randomly choose companies of different sectors and sizes and reach specially selected persons in those companies. It took respondents up to a quarter of an hour to fill in the questionnaire. During the completion of the questionnaires there were some drop-outs, however, the research company delivered 100 properly filled-in surveys.

While this study did not have the framework of a randomised controlled trial (RCT), deliberately picked participants could offer the most reliable insights about T&D practices in their respective organisations. They were confirmed by the research institution, to be persons involved in the T&D department or, alternatively, the HR department. The e-mail contacts of the respondents could be delivered on request.

3.3. Data Analysis

In order to answer the research questions related to changes in T&D activities applied as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, relations and correlations between particular elements/steps of T&D activities, and the differences between companies in terms of implementing or managing T&D activities, statistical analyses were conducted using version 13.0 of Statistica. Descriptive statistics and correlations were provided to describe the sample. T-tests were performed to establish the significance of differences between variables.

4. Results

4.1. Sample

The study of 100 establishments was conducted in a cross-sectional sample. Its characteristics are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. General Characteristics of a Study Sample (Total $n = 100$)

Variable	%
Company size:	
Medium 51–250 employees	27
Large > 250 employees	73
Company type:	
National	51
International	49
Company sector:	
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	3
Manufacturing	29
Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply	3
Water supply, sewerage, waste management and remediation activities	2
Construction	5
Wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	4
Transporting and storage	6
Accommodation and food service activities	2
Information and communication	6
Financial and insurance activities	2
Real estate activities	3
Professional, scientific, and technical activities	7
Administrative and support service activities	4
Public administration and defence, social security	12

Table 1 cnt'd

Variable	%
Education	3
Human health and social work activities	4
Arts, entertainment and recreation	3
Other	2
Respondents age:	
18–29	3
30–44	70
45–64	27
Overall job tenure:	
Less than 1 year	1
1–5 years	12
6–10 years	30
11–20 years	40
More than 20 years	17
Job tenure in the current position:	
Less than 1 year	4
1–5 years	4
6–10 years	46
11–20 years	31
More than 20 years	19
Current position:	
Manager or director	53
Specialist	47
Department:	
HR	48
T&D	43
Other	9

Source: the authors.

4.2. Scales

The reliability of all dimensions of T&D processes implicit in subscales was satisfactory. The Cronbach's alpha for each subscale was as follows: 0.80 for policy, 0.73 for expectations, 0.80 for diagnosis, 0.83 for preparation, 0.81 for implementation, 0.84 for monitoring, 0.83 for trainees, 0.80 for trainers, 0.74 for investment and expenditure, 0.84 for evaluation, 0.79 for results, and 0.82 for controlling.

4.3. Descriptive Statistics

Detailed analysis of basic descriptive statistics such as means and standard deviations of all dimensions (Table 2) revealed the overall trends in implementing changes in T&D activities during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 2. Means and SD of All Dimensions in the Research Sample

Questionnaire Dimensions	Mean	SD
Policy	3.83	1.30
Expectations	3.97	1.43
Diagnosis	3.89	1.35
Preparation	3.83	1.41
Implementation	3.90	1.38
Monitoring	3.86	1.40
Trainees	3.28	1.31
Trainers	3.36	1.35
Investment and expenditures	3.54	1.39
Evaluation	3.91	1.21
Results	3.56	1.28
Controlling	3.69	1.38

Source: the authors.

The mean values of the 12 dimensions varied between 3.28 for trainees and 3.97 for expectations. Given that the average value was 3.5 in a 1–6 scale, it can be seen that respondents agreed with the opinion that most of the procedures and activities related to T&D were changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Quite curiously, the highest value was obtained for expectations (3.97), followed by evaluation (3.91), implementation (3.9), diagnosis (3.89), and monitoring (3.86), closely followed by policy and preparation, both with 3.83. Therefore, the *ex-ante* activities, the implementation and the evaluation of T&D seem to have received a lot of attention in companies regarding T&D. Controlling (with 3.69), results (3.56), as well as investments and expenditures (3.54), were not so affected. Dimensions assessing the situation of the trainers (3.36) and trainees (3.28) revealed some changes due to the pandemic but less significant than the rest of the processes.

4.4. Correlation Analysis

The correlation between all of the dimensions was examined in order to analyse the relationships between them. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Correlation between Dimensions

Dimension	Policy	Expectations	Diagnosis	Preparation	Implementation	Monitoring	Trainees	Trainers	Investment	Evaluation	Results	Controlling
Policy	1.000											
Expectations	0.777**	1.000										
Diagnosis	0.730**	0.774**	1.000									
Preparation	0.692*	0.749**	0.754**	1.000								
Implementation	0.782**	0.765**	0.807**	0.775**	1.000							
Monitoring	0.689*	0.714**	0.819**	0.715**	0.783**	1.000						
Trainees	0.514*	0.428*	0.505*	0.449	0.535*	0.491*	1.000					
Trainers	0.529*	0.498*	0.508*	0.507*	0.542*	0.564*	0.618*	1.000				
Investment	0.631*	0.659*	0.710**	0.619*	0.674*	0.687*	0.474*	0.603*	1.000			
Evaluation	0.667*	0.644*	0.796**	0.672*	0.745*	0.784**	0.443*	0.577*	0.663*	1.000		
Results	0.666*	0.670*	0.656*	0.624*	0.697*	0.674	0.428*	0.588*	0.561*	0.660*	1.000	
Controlling	0.649*	0.641*	0.739**	0.650*	0.663*	0.753**	0.468*	0.525*	0.62*	0.703*	0.578*	1.000

Notes: *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$.

Source: the authors.

The analysis shows that all dimensions have a significant correlation with each other. The following correlate especially strongly: policy with expectations; diagnosis with implementation; expectations with diagnosis, preparation, implementation, and monitoring; diagnosis with all of the others apart from trainers and trainees; results and preparation with implementation and monitoring; implementation with monitoring and evaluation; monitoring with evaluation and controlling; evaluation with controlling. However, in general, all subscales are closely related to each other, they all represent separate processes within the T&D practices. It suggests high consistency of the processes; when one has changed significantly due to the pandemic, the others have changed as well. The trend is also present in trainers and trainees, which means changes in planning and organising T&D processes go hand in hand with the problems reported by trainers and participants. These correlations are not as strong as the others, but still significant. They might help employees with the process of adopting changes.

4.5. Analysis of Differences

Due to excessive discrepancies in sample sizes regarding the size and sector of the companies, the significance of the differences in these variables was not analysed. Regarding the type of organisation (national or international), there were no differences between the T&D subscales (parts). However, there were two noticeable differences between the two survey statements shown in Table 4 below. The results mean that in multinational companies, the need for new T&D specialists during the COVID-19 pandemic was less than in national companies, and training participants had a better work-life balance.

Table 4. Significant Differences between National and International Organisations in Responses to Survey Statements

Questionnaire Dimension and Item Number	National	International	T-test	Level of Significance
Expectations 8 The COVID-19 pandemic has meant new skills are required by T&D specialists	4.333	3.775	2.069	0.04
Trainees 39f During the COVID-19 pandemic trainees in my company experienced a high degree of work-life imbalance	3.313	3.877	–2.190	0.03

Source: the authors.

Furthermore, there were no differences in the responses of managers and specialists to dimensions and particular survey statements. There were also no differences between the answers gained from HR and T&D representatives. Two variables (current position and department) did not produce differences in the study sample.

4.6. Analysis of Extremes

Regarding the lack of main differences between respondents' answers in all subscales, and an in-depth investigation of extremes (percentage of 5 – "I agree" and 6 – "I definitely agree" responses) in each survey statement gave the possibility to point out the most crucial changes indicated by respondents. Below a short description of extremes was conducted.

Policy

The most influential answer in this subscale regarded the statement: "The T&D policy has been changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic". A third of respondents (33%) admitted that the pandemic had changed the T&D policy, and 23% said that it had improved. Additionally, respondents underlined that the T&D policy most often had a positive influence on such factors as skills development (50%), quality of work (42%), and employee engagement (41%).

Expectation

The most common changes were introduced due to the need for employees and T&D specialists to acquire new skills. According to 41% of respondents, the pandemic resulted in demands for higher skills among employees. While 43% declared that T&D specialists are required to have new skills. Additionally, every third respondent declared that the company dealt with the T&D challenges related to the pandemic by using solely internal resources. On the other hand, 35% of the surveyed companies cooperated with external T&D companies and coaches to face the challenges related to the pandemic.

Diagnosis

Analysis of this subscale did not reveal huge changes, however, 26% of respondents admitted that due to the pandemic, the diagnosis of T&D activities has become more difficult, and 33% – it has become more detailed. Additionally, according to 32% of respondents, reasons for running T&D activities were changed, as well as subject matter of training (30%).

Preparation

The COVID-19 pandemic affected the preparation and organisation of activity in the surveyed companies. 36% of respondents agreed that more people needed to be engaged in preparing T&D activities than before the COVID-19 pandemic,

and 32% of them admitted that the preparation phase became more difficult because of the pandemic restrictions.

Implementation

The respondents most often agreed that the pandemic contributed to new ways of implementing T&D activities (46%), and 36% of respondents agreed that the new methods are being used to this day. It is also worth noting that the pandemic caused problems in implementing some activities. Every third respondent (36%) said that activities were temporarily halted (then resumed), while 29% of respondents stated that activities were permanently halted.

Monitoring

This subscale contains the two statements which received the highest support from respondents. The COVID-19 pandemic contributed to the use of new ways of monitoring T&D activities (37%), and 39% of respondents pointed to the need for more detailed monitoring of T&D activities.

Trainees

32% of respondents admitted that the number of trainees increased during the pandemic. Trainees most often experienced stress (29%) and isolation (33%). They hardly ever suffered discrimination (9%) or incompatibility (11%).

Trainers

During the pandemic, the main problem for 33% of trainers was the use of remote communication channels during training sessions. Moreover, 30% of respondents indicated that maintaining the participants' interest and engagement was the most common problem for trainers.

Investment and expenditure

The results of the conducted study indicate that most companies did not incur extra costs on T&D activities. Only 25% of respondents admitted an increase in T&D expenditures during the COVID-19 pandemic, and 27% declared an increase in investments in remote T&D activities.

Evaluation

There were no significant changes revealed in the analysis of this subscale. Only 28% of respondents admitted that the evaluation of T&D activities became less frequent and more succinct.

Results

34% of respondents indicated an increase in work quality due to T&D activities during the pandemic. They also underlined the negative effects of participating

in T&D activities that contributed to an increase in absence (34%) and turnover (26%), which was quite surprising.

Controlling

40% of respondents said that the audits of T&D activities did not become more difficult and diverse, but 29% of them admitted that the companies had to develop new ways of auditing processes due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

5. Discussion

The findings of the study prove that in most of the researched subscales changes in T&D activities were introduced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic in Poland, and that these changes have been rated highly. In particular – changes in the *ex-ante* activities, the implementation and the evaluation seemed to become permanent in Polish companies.

For example – the respondents (46%) admitted that the pandemic had contributed to new ways of implementing T&D activities, and these changes have become regular practice in current company settings. New ways of monitoring T&D activities were the result of the actions taken by the companies and are still being used now. What is more – 34% of respondents indicated an increase in work quality due to T&D. Unlike the Mikołajczyk's study (2022), which showed decreased employee engagement, Polish companies managed to adapt to the changed COVID-19 environment to the satisfaction of both – employees and the companies.

The analysis indicates that all T&D elements/parts correlate strongly with each other. The particularly strong correlations are: policy with expectations; diagnosis and implementation; expectations with diagnosis, preparation, implementation, and monitoring; diagnosis with all of the others apart from trainers and trainees; results and preparation with implementation and monitoring; implementation with monitoring and evaluation; monitoring with evaluation and controlling; evaluation with controlling. This proves the high consistency of the T&D interventions.

There were not many differences between various dimensions of T&D in national and international companies however, the results indicate that in national companies, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused the need for new T&D specialists to a greater extent than in multinational companies and that training participants experienced worse work-life balance in Polish companies than in international ones. The significance of the differences in these variables was not analysed.

To conclude, the companies in Poland have made an effort to adapt to the "remote new normal". The process of developing and unleashing human expertise through organisational development and training during the COVID-19 pandemic was successful and served the purpose of improving performance.

For all the millions of words written every day about the COVID-19 pandemic and remote work, there are very few, if any, national studies that analyse the impact of the pandemic on T&D activities. Given that T&D is essential for economies, the data that were collected show that policy, expectations, preparation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation became more important. There is less certainty about investments, expenditures, controlling and results. There are, however, doubts about trainees and trainers. This goes along with the human capital model, which states that spending is easy, but benefitting from the people is more difficult.

As the COVID-19 pandemic came to an end, various forms of remote work remained, and this implies that investments made in remote work should be very attentive to trainees and trainers because they are the elements of the system for which there are more doubts about the outcomes.

The current research has some limitations which need to be considered. Firstly, this study was based on a small sample size. Future research could be extended to a larger one to include more quantitative analysis. Secondly, the research included companies from Poland – an EU member. The enterprises from non-EU countries might provide interesting insights into training and development practices during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thirdly, further research is also needed to investigate the extent to which the present results apply to the expectations towards training and development after three years of the pandemic.

The subject of this study might be an inspiration for additional research into this area. Comparative analyses of training and development in Central Eastern Europe and Western Europe, such as (Tomé, Tracz-Krupa & Molek-Winiarska, 2023) are worth conducting. They could establish basic patterns in policy provision and show practices at a national level and their underlying socio-cultural legitimacy. Moreover, they could inform and assist others, e.g. later transitioning and countries joining the EU, in developing their human resources (Tomé & Tracz-Krupa, 2019). There are important structural, institutional and configurational differences with essential differences in HRD practices in CEE arising from historical and ideational legacies (Morley *et al*., 2016). Another interesting direction of research may be the exploration of spending on training and development of human resources from EU funds, with a particular emphasis on the European Social Fund, also to make an assessment of the management systems adopted by national institutions and to compare these systems with the established best practice (see Tomé & Tracz-Krupa, 2019).

6. Final Conclusions

The paper provides a list of general and specific ideas on what happened to T&D activities in Poland during the pandemic. By and large, more planning was done, and many actions were implemented. The evaluation of expenses and results

is debatable, and the big question rests on the evolution of trainees and trainers, who are the HR face of T&D. Therefore, after the COVID-19 pandemic, more attention than ever should be paid to trainers and trainees in the realm of T&D.

Also, it is necessary to conduct further theoretical and empirical research on the training and development of human resources, with the use of both internal and external resources, as it will not only enrich scientific knowledge and rationalise the research methodology but will also allow the formulation of useful recommendations for a business.

Even though the article provides the research findings within a small sample, we see potential practical and social contributions. The final results of the research can be used to improve training and development programmes offered by companies to equip their employees with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes needed in their workplace. They could also provide information to external training providers to improve and adjust their services according to the opinions of the respondents of the study. Additionally, the research findings can serve institutions responsible for policy provision of HRD at a national level that provides possibilities to apply for funding either within national or regional funds like the National Training Fund in Poland or from European Union money at a national level.

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Authors' Contribution

The authors' individual contribution is as follows: Katarzyna Tracz-Krupa 45%, Dorota Molek-Winiarska 45%, Eduardo Tomé 10%.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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