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THE USE OF MODERN REMOTE COMMUNICATION TOOLS IN IMPROVING PROCESSES OF A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION BASED ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE STUDENT GOVERNMENT OF THE WROCLAW UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS

WYKORZYSTANIE NOWOCZESNYCH NARZĘDZI KOMUNIKACJI ZDALNEJ W DOSKONALENIU PROCESÓW ORGANIZACJI *NON-PROFIT* NA PRZYKŁADZIE SAMORZĄDU STUDENTÓW UNIWERSYTETU EKONOMICZNEGO WE WROCŁAWIU

Abstract: The use of remote communication tools is nowadays becoming a phenomenon which is more and more visible not only in companies, but also in other entities of the economy. The use of modern remote communication tools allows for increasing the functional efficiency of the entity and improving contact between members of the unit. The paper presents the actual ways in which modern remote communication tools are used

both between t h e members of a student organisation and with other entities, the types of these tools and the characteristic nature of such an entity in the era of the coronavirus pandemic.

Keywords: remote communication, student organisation, stakeholders, process improvement, non-profit organisation.

Streszczenie: Wykorzystywanie narzędzi komunikacji zdalnej w obecnych czasach staje się zjawiskiem coraz częściej zauważalnym nie tylko w firmach, ale także w innych podmiotach gospodarki. Użytkowanie nowoczesnych narzędzi komunikacji zdalnej pozwala na zwiększenie efektywności funkcjonalnej danego podmiotu oraz usprawnienie kontaktu pomiędzy członkami jednostki. W pracy zaprezentowano rzeczywiste sposoby wykorzystania nowoczesnych narzędzi komunikacji zdalnej zarówno pomiędzy członkami organizacji studenckiej, jak i z innymi podmiotami, rodzaje tych narzędzi oraz charakterystyczny dla tego rodzaju podmiotu charakter działania w dobie pandemii COVID-19.

Słowa kluczowe: komunikacja zdalna, organizacja studencka, interesariusze, doskonalenie procesów, działalność *non-profit*.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, communication tools are a key element of every properly functioning institution. Especially today i t can be observed how important it is to choose an appropriate communication tool, to adapt its features to the characteristics of users or the whole organisation so that it supports the functioning of the unit in an effective way. In the era of the COVID-19 pandemic, the increased activity of people in the virtual world can also be observed, hence traditional forms and tools of information transfer have been replaced by virtual ones, such as e-mail, video conference, and information groups on popular communication platforms.

The use of modern remote communication tools in process improvement also includes such entities as student organisations, functioning on similar principles to non-profit organisations. These entities focus their attention on what kind of information flow processes occur both inside the organisation and what they look like outside; which communication tools to choose and what pros and cons are generated by the choice of these and not other tools for information transfer; which is a particular key element in the attempt to maintain t h e proper activity of student organisation members, who are above all, people living in the virtual world and surrounded by information at every step.

The aim of the article was to indicate and characterize the remote communication tools in improving the processes of a non-profit organisation based on the example of the student government functioning at the Wroclaw University of Economics and Business. Such a defined purpose of the article required presenting a broad perspective of the range of tools and processes used to support the processes of remote communication in the organization.

2. Literature research

The literature analysis carried out by the authors concerned first of all the definition of the term 'non-profit organisation' and providing a classification of the key characteristics of this term.

A non-governmental organisation may take various names, conditioned by the specificity of its activity (Główny Urząd Statystyczny [GUS], 2019; Grzelońska, 2011, pp. 325-344; Handbook on Non-Profit Institutions in the System of National Accounts, 2003, pp. 18-20; Ustawa z dnia 24 kwietnia 2003 r.). However, regardless of the minimal differences in the form of functioning, the common denominator for all NGOs remains that they work for the public benefit without accumulating profits from this activity (Praska-Kruszyńska, 2003, p. 82; Szulc, 2010, pp. 81-99; Zawadzki, 2007, p. 9). In sociology, the concept of social organisation is somewhat broader and defines it as an organised set of shared social activities and relations that perform essential functions for the sake of the social good, while forming a whole that is distinguished by its manner, scope and characteristics from other similar organisations (Dart, 2004, pp. 290-310; Mrzygłocka-Chojnacka, 2014, pp. 162-164; Shaw and Allen, 2009, pp. 83-96).

There are many definitions of social organisations, but the most common, due to the nature of their activities, are as follows:

- non-profit, whose name translated from English means non-profit-oriented organisations;
- non-profit, which do not operate for profit, but may apply to various institutions for income, with the assumption that all income generated will be donated to the organisation's statutory objectives;
- NGOs, which operate for the benefit of the community, are independent of the government and state administration, but in certain exceptions may carry out tasks commissioned by the state apparatus;
- NGOs, also called non-governmental organisations, in free translation (especially at international level), NGOs are defined as working for the public benefit, and the term NGO is used mainly in international relations;
- civic, focused on action for the benefit of society, for example local or wider; the concept of civic organisation indicates a secondary role for the state and greater self-organisation of citizens;
- general interest, i.e. organisations whose main purpose is to support and serve society;
- the third sector, as organisations that operate in a separate area from the public administration or business organisations sector (Bode, 2006, pp. 346-359; Dart, 2004, pp. 290-310; Zawadzki, 2007, pp. 9-10).

Additional terms for community organisations are:
- private voluntary organisations,
- NGOs created by government agencies,
- quasi-governmental organisations,

- NGOs created by enterprises,
- NGOs created by a funder,
- political NGOs (Domański, 2010, p. 28),
- charities and welfare organisations,
- non-profit organisations (Fudaliński, 2013, p. 21).

When analysing the legal basis for the operation of social organisations, it should be taken into account that the definition of their operation has not been fully unambiguously defined, and consequently there is no single legal system of operation in the legal, economic and tax sphere common to all types of social organisations. In Polish law, the most appropriate legal acts regulating the operation of social organisations can be regarded as:

- The Act of 24 April 2003 on public benefit activity and volunteerism,
- The Act of 7 April 1989 on the law on associations,
- The Act of 6 April 1984 on foundations,
- The Act of 2 July 2004 on freedom of economic activity,
- The Act of 29 August 1997 on the tax ordinance.

Thus, it can be seen that in addition to the traditional division of public benefit organisations into those indicated above, there are in practice such organisational units as associations or foundations that pursue statutory objectives based on the main principle of public benefit activity. Irrespective of the principles of the functioning of a social organisation, those that operate in a legally formalised manner by statute, just like any economic entity, are subject to the provisions of the tax law and the accounting law to the extent of the responsibility given by the acts and laws regulating their functioning (Hwang and Powell, 2009, pp. 268-298; Kreutzer and Jäger, 2011, pp. 634-661).

3. Methodology

The considerations presented in the article are the result of the conducted research process. The first stage of the research was to conduct a critical analysis of the literature on defining and characterising non-profit organisations. At this stage, the authors reviewed domestic and foreign scientific studies. As a result of the systematic literature analysis, the following utilitarian research questions were defined:

- Can the main characteristics of a non-profit organisation be defined?
- Is student self-government an example of a classical non-profit organisation?

The above research questions determined the elements of the research methodology, which consisted of the following research techniques:

- analysis of the founding documents and documents defining the functioning of SSUEW,
- analysis of process management organisation solutions,
- direct observation,
- direct participation in information processes.

4. Results

Among numerous processes of operation of the student government as a social organisation, that of remote communication can be distinguished. Due to the social nature of the activity, this process is one of the key ones, considering the tasks fulfilled by the student government at the university and the need to maintain constant contact with its main recipients − the students. Due to the specific nature of the operation of self-government as a student organisation, created by the students of the University recruited to the organisation in a planned recruitment process, the use of remote communication tools is a crucial aspect. The specifics of the tools used for remote communication are directly influenced by stakeholder groups, among which there are:

1) university students,
2) older administrative groups,
3) organisational units of the university,
4) financial partners,
5) boards of student organisations and scientific circles at the university (ZOiK),
6) bodies of the local government, which include student representatives:
   a) the university council of the students' self-government (RUSS) − a collegiate decision-making body,
   b) students' self-government board − a collegiate executive body,
   c) student government committees − executive body (each of the eight committees is led by a relevant board member),
   d) coordinators and project teams, implementing projects and initiatives of the student government.

The above division is oriented towards the main stakeholder groups in the remote communication process (points 1 to 5) as well as towards the local government bodies (point 6). The characteristics of the stakeholder group are characterised by the external process of information flow, whereby slightly different (simpler) communication tools are used. In functional and project activities, on the other hand, there can be distinguished tools aimed at streamlining communication processes between members of particular bodies and within a given group, as well as allowing the acquisition of new and the development of existing competencies in the use of modern remote communication tools.

Modern remote communication tools used to improve student organisation processes include:

1. Google family tools:
   a. Google Drive,
   b. Google Calendar,
   c. Google Meet,
   d. documents, worksheets, presentations, forms,
   e. Gmail.

2. Facebook family tools:
    a. Facebook discussion groups,
    b. Messenger.
3. Microsoft family tools:
    a. Microsoft Teams,
    b. Microsoft Office (including: Word, Excel, PowerPoint).
4. Trello.

A detailed description of the use of each of the tools in use is presented below, together with an example of a functional solution used in a student organisation, which is the subject of this thesis.

1. Tools from the Google family:
    a. Google Drive − used to collect and store all documentation related to the day-to-day work of the student government bodies (the stakeholders listed in point 6), as well as project work; documentation stored on Google Drive constitutes an important source of knowledge for members of the organisation, as well as a working area for documents and files created and shared with others; Figure 1 presents a set of documentation related to the activities of the student government body (the board); Figure 2 presents an example of a set of files shared by the board member for image and promotion, who is a member of the board. Figure 2 shows an example of a file made available by the board member for image and promotion to the members of the committee he/she leads; Figure 3 shows a file collection concerning the self-government's project activity, the so-called project database, with a breakdown into project documentation for each of the implemented projects;
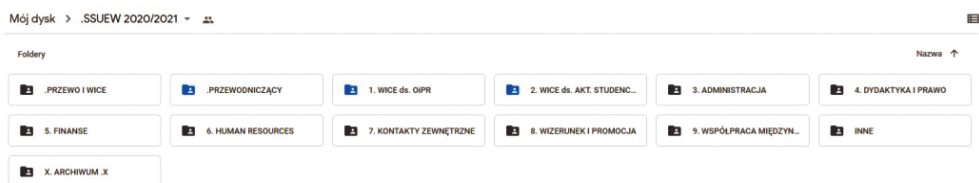

Fig. 1. Google Drive workspace dedicated to the student government board and grouped in specific folders by each board member.

Source: own elaboration.

b. Google Calendar − a tool used to set scheduled tasks to be completed, meetings and other events in the student organization; in terms of project activities, the Calendar also publishes application deadlines for the functions of project coordinators and project teams; Figure 4 shows an example of the use of the tool to schedule the work week for the function of the chair of the student government; Figure 5 shows the application schedule for student government projects;
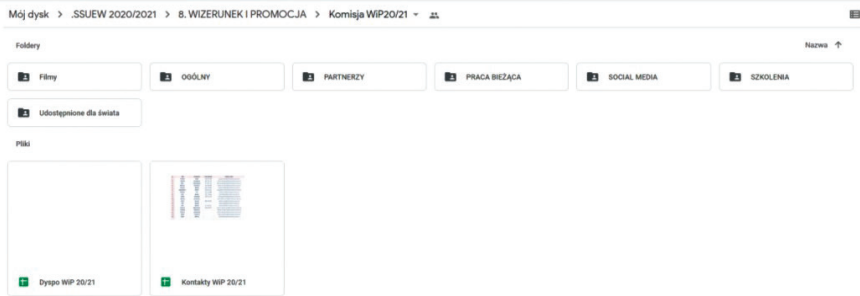
Fig. 2. Google Drive workspace set aside by the student government board member for image and promotion for members belonging to the student government board committee on PR and promotion
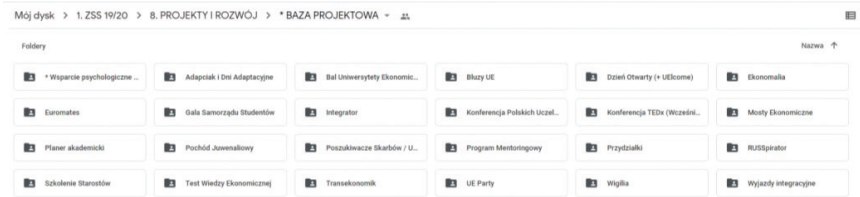
Source: own elaboration.

Fig. 3. Workspace on Google Drive allocated by the Vice-President for student activities in relation to ongoing projects by the student self-government
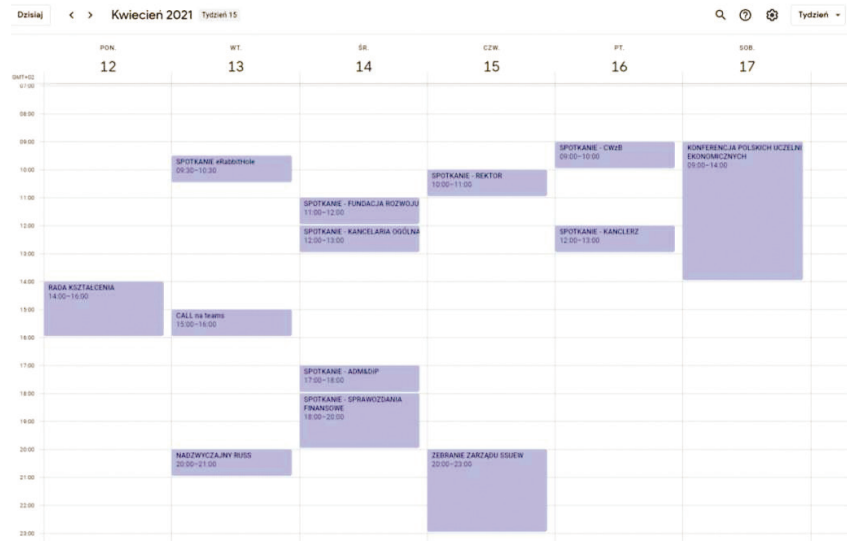
Source: own elaboration.

Fig. 4. Example of the use of Google Calendar by the student council president in organising the weekly meeting schedule

Source: own elaboration.

Fig. 5. Using Google Calendar to schedule applications for student government project preparation team members

Source: own elaboration.

    c. Google Meet − an application used to conduct remote meetings of local government bodies and integration meetings in a remote form; due to the similar nature of the use of the application to Microsoft Teams, Google Meet is most often used for meetings with bodies and institutions outside the university, which are not embedded in the ue.wroc.pl domain on the Office 365 platform and cannot make full use of the functionality of Microsoft Teams;

    d. documents, sheets, presentations, forms − a group of tools used to create documents in a remote form, with simultaneous editing by multiple people in real time. These tools, like those belonging to the Microsoft Office group, are used for day-to-day and project-based work in the organisation; Figure 6 shows an example of the use of Google Form as a ballot for members of the legislative body − the University Council of the student government; Figure 7 shows a spreadsheet used to draw up the student government's provisional budget.

Fig. 6. Example of using Google Form as a ballot during a remote meeting for members of the University student government

Source: own elaboration.

Fig. 7. Example of using a Google Spreadsheet to produce a student government provisional budget

Source: own elaboration.

    e. Gmail – a tool used as the main information relay within the organisation and as an official communicator with external entities, i.e. other student council bodies, university authorities and external institutions.

2. Facebook tools:
    a. discussion groups on Facebook – an unofficial tool of the Facebook platform used in the process of internal communication between the members of the organisation, or in the case of some bodies of the students' self-government; Figure 8 shows the use of this tool in the case of communication between the president of the student self-government (who directs the work of the legislative body) and the members of the RUSS;
    b. Messenger – the application is used for ongoing and daily internal communication between all members of the organisation. The messages sent are informal, most of them based on maintaining the general integration of the members of the organization.

3. Microsoft tools:
    a. Microsoft Teams – a tool is used during conducted videoconferences and official meetings, which can be accessed by all students of the university,
    e.g. open meetings of RUSS, or meetings with university authorities, during which students are represented by other members; Figure 9 shows the distribution of remote teams where remote meetings take place.
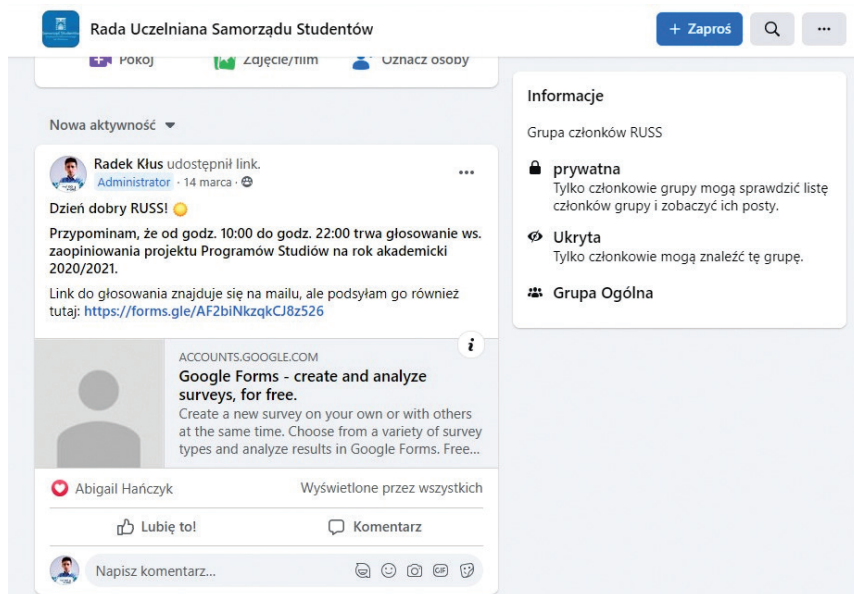
Fig. 8. Example of using a discussion group on the Facebook platform to communicate with members of the legislative body
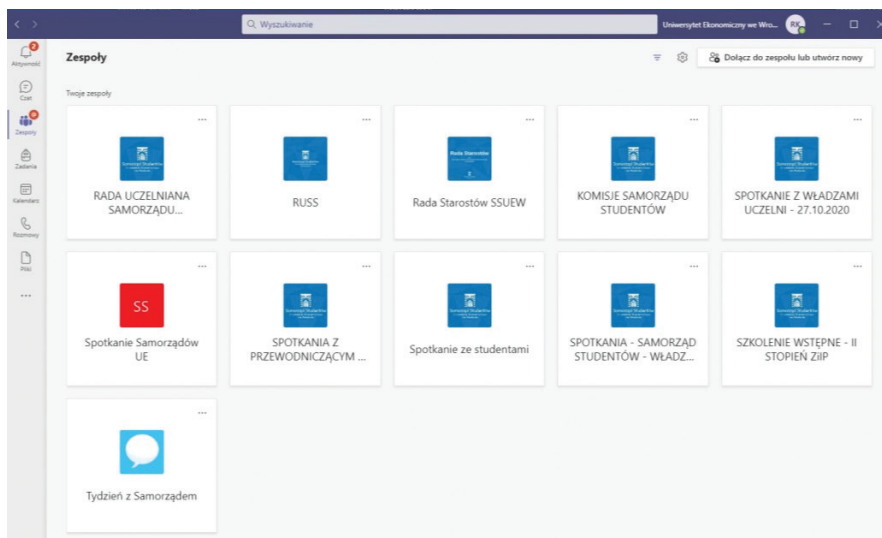
Source: own elaboration.

Fig. 9. Example of using the Microsoft Teams tool to create remote teams with remote meetings – remote teams in the figure are divided by meeting topic

Source: own elaboration.

  b. Microsoft Office (including: Word, Excel, PowerPoint) − a group of tools used to create documents remotely, with simultaneous editing by multiple people in real time; these tools, like those in the Google group, are used for ongoing work on draft documents with university staff.

 4. Trello − a tool is used in particular by the student self-government board to streamline decision-making and management processes and to control the implementation of tasks and agreed strategic objectives; Figure 10 presents a division of the application panel into boards used by the board to supervise the relevant elements of activity; Figure 11 presents a division of the application panel into lists used by the student self-government chair and vice-chairs to control the implementation of key tasks.

Fig. 10. Example use of the Trello tool in the day-to-day work of the student self-government board. The figure presents the division of the panel into workspaces used by team members
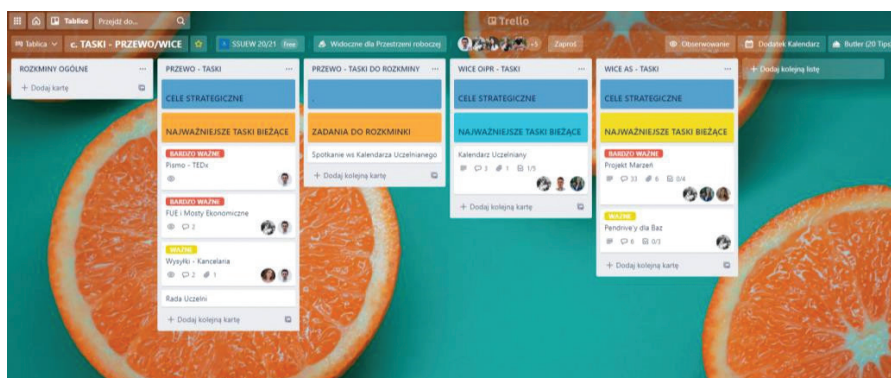
Source: own elaboration.

Fig. 11. Workspace allocated in the Trello tool for the chair and vice-chairs. The figure shows lists of tasks divided into strategic objectives and ongoing tasks

Source: own elaboration.

The presented tools are used in the current work of the members of the organisation as well as by students carrying out student government projects. Importantly, the range of remote tools used is affected by the coronavirus pandemic, which resulted in their increased use in the daily activities of the organization and its members. Specifically, the increased usage relates to applications that support remote meetings, such as Google Meet, and Microsoft Teams. The need to reach a large audience (the entire organization has over 70 active members) required a change in the way some tasks were carried out, e.g. monthly meetings of the entire organization, local government bodies, or integration meetings had to be carried out in a new, remote form, which had not been used in the student community so far.

5. Discussion

The use of modern remote communication tools for process improvement can occur in a wide spectrum in different types of business entities. As shown in the results of the study, improving the functionality of operations through the application of remote communication tools is also used in social organizations, which include the student government of the Wroclaw University of Economics. Despite the specific form and scope of activity, this organization uses a number of applications and remote tools to organize the current work and the initiatives and projects undertaken. The purpose of using remote communication solutions is, in particular, to improve the performance of members of the organization, the exchange of knowledge, its collection and storage, as well as the efficient flow of information between all organs of the self-government, students and university authorities. The highly developed structure of the organization and the large number of its members require the management of the entity (the self-government board) to introduce improvements and new tools, corresponding to the needs of the organization. The remote communication tools presented in the previous section are part of modern solutions to improve the flow of information between units of the entity, as well as other, external stakeholders. An important phenomenon, noticed in the perspective of limitations related to the possibility of in-situ meetings caused by the coronavirus pandemic, is the transfer of the entire activity of the student organization responsible for the use of communication, organization of meetings and current work, to the remote tools previously unused by members of the entity. Extending the problem of the use of modern applications for remote communication, it is possible to additionally formulate questions relating to the impact of this phenomenon on the motivation of members of the non-profit organisation, or the effectiveness of the activities of the entire entity and the changes that can be observed in cooperation with stakeholders.

6. Conclusion

The use of modern remote tools is noticeable in various social entities, e.g. student organisations. Based on the example of the student government, the study showed how, in their current and project activities, its members use applications and tools supporting remote communication on a daily basis in order to effectively manage the entity and achieve its objectives.

The article identifies and presents the remote communication tools used in the organization, focusing on both internal and external recipients. The main conclusion is the diversity and characteristics of the tools used in the organization. Both the mode of communication itself and the tools used in the communication process are virtual and tailored to a particular audience. This is related to the effectiveness of a given communication tool and the habits of a given audience group, which is also due to the long-standing use of similar forms of information flow in the previous years of the student organization, namely the student government. The presented communication tools used in a student organization as well as their well-established use allow for the effective streamlining of the subject's processes.

The considerations of the authors of the article result from their experience in the area of student activity and the practical application of the communication tools indicated earlier, as well as their participation in the processes of improving the activity of the organization.

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