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THE WORLD DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: REMOTE WORK AND VIRTUAL TEAMS IN GEORGIA

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INTRODUCTION

In the modern world, the nature of work has changed significantly. The development of information technology and creation of fast and reliable communications networks enabled organisations to become more geographically proliferated. As a result, there has been a significant growth in organisations' use of remote work and virtual teams over the past few decades, and this trend is going to continue in the future. According to the survey, 85% of 1,372 business respondents from 80 countries did remote work and 48% reported that over half their virtual team members were representing different cultures (Hoch, and Dulebohn 2017a: 569).

In a number of sectors, from cell phones to banking and financial institutions, team-working strategies and techniques have been used. Some of the earliest examples can be found in the manufacturing sector, where multi-skilled operator teams were working together to create a product (Gyllenhammar 1977: 45). Nevertheless, the same trend can be seen during the product development process, where people from different parts of the organisation work together from different places in order to create a new product or in the service sector, where people with different qualifications work together to deliver services to customers (Kimble 2011: 7).

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According to Lisa Kimball over the last years the nature of employees has changed significantly because of the changes made in the organisations and the nature of work that employees do. Organisations have become more proliferated all over the world, and the development of new technologies has led to the creation of virtual workplaces (Kimball 1997: 8).

The main purpose of the paper is to determine the current situation of the public and private sector employees in Georgia that resulted from the restrictions adopted by the country in order to reduce the threat of the coronavirus spread. In addition, the research seeks to identify and examine the factors that influence employees' remote work effectiveness and to determine under what conditions remote work and virtual teams can be a worthwhile investment in a public or private organisation.

The research has exposed the main challenges that need to be faced and dealt with in order to ensure effective and efficient functioning of remote work and virtual team systems in the country.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Teams are organisational units that share a common objective and their members have a sense of shared responsibility for the results obtained by the team (Kimble 2011: 7). Chris Kimble (2011: 6) states that the age of globalisation, international trade, and fast communications networks enabled team members located in different buildings, different cities, or even on different continents to work together towards a common goal. Anthony Townsend et al. have defined virtual teams as a

groups of geographically and/or organisationally dispersed co-workers that are assembled with the use of a combination of telecommunications and information technologies to accomplish an organisational task (Townsend et al. 1998: 17).

According to Bradford Bell, and Stewe Kozlowski (2002: 14) virtual teams are located in different geographical areas, have limited face-to-face contact and are using electronic communications systems in order to achieve a common organisational goals.

As Jessica Lipnack, and Jeffrey Stamps state

a virtual team is a group of people who work on interdependent tasks guided by a common purpose. But unlike traditional, co-located teams, a virtual team works across space, time, and organisational boundaries that often extend across nations on a global basis (Lipnack and Stamps 2000: 15).

Differences in culture and time zones can affect virtual teams' performance. For example, scholars advise to take into consideration the differences in time zones since these can affect the success of remote work and virtual teams (Bringas 2008: 39). According to Pauleen (2003: 75–87), there are many different variables that can result in the remote work effective functioning. Pauleen states that collaborative behaviour such as communication, trust and leadership style can have a fundamental influence on it.

Kimball also argues that doing remote work is not about using old management methods; it is rather about expanding available tools in order to create the effective collaborative work. For instance, Kimball Fisher, and Mareen Fisher (2001: 42) found out that many companies, employees and teams routinely collaborate virtually. Some of the scholars believe that the technological expertise is not a key factor for successful virtual teams. According to them, the key factor consists in transparent and clear understanding of what it takes to get the company ready to operate virtually (Bringas 2008: 4).

Virtual teams are significantly different from traditional ones. Members of traditional teams work next to each other and have face-to-face communication, while in virtual teams they work in different locations. Moreover, virtual teams rely on electronic communication.

Sirkka Jarvenpaa, and Dorothy Leidner (1999: 811–813) have identified virtual teams' four characteristics:

- **Temporary:** Virtual teams are organised to perform a particular task. Virtual teams have a lot of possibilities to work in a global environment and it gives them an opportunity to have access to a range of people.
- **Culturally diverse:** Virtual teams' competitive advantage is that their members were born in different countries, have different nationalities and use different languages. This diversity helps a team to generate new ideas to accomplish a specific task.
- **Geographically dispersed:** Members of the teams are in various locations and good example of it is the IT sector.
- **Communicates electronically:** Information technologies are used by virtual teams to communicate. Technology offers team members the possibility of connecting with each other across time and space.

Most scholars think that managing and handling virtual teams is crucial (Hoch, and Dulebohn 2017a: 570). In the 1990s, virtual teams were established by organisations in order to work on temporary and short life cycle projects. These teams were formed mainly based on a need to gather

necessary information with the aim to solve complex or non-routine problems. In the early period virtual teams afforded limited opportunities to form social relationships, but nowadays organisations are establishing and forming virtual teams to perform ordinary daily tasks. Furthermore, companies encourage workers to work from whatever remote location they prefer (Alsharo et al. 2017: 480).

Stacie Furst et al. (2004: 9–11) mentions the importance of Tuckman's stage model of virtual team development. The model includes forming, storming, norming, and performing stages. The scholars say that virtual teams are progressing across these development stages but there are differences in the speed and development pattern, in particular:

- In the forming stage, managers provide coaching for the team members, establish a common sense of the team identity and understanding, create a clear goal and receive support from senior leaders.
- The storming steps include: face-to-face team building communication, training and finding solutions to the existing problems.
- During the norming steps, managers create team charters and set individual accountability. Also, the procedures for information sharing are being established.
- Finally, the performing steps include company culture support for the virtual team's work. Additionally, the provision of resources for the team to perform work successfully (Furst et al. 2004: 9–11).

Reducing relocation time and travel costs, greater degree of freedom to individuals involved in the development of the projects, greater productivity, shorter development times, better outcomes and attraction of better employees, higher degree of cohesion, pollution reduction, creating and dispersing improved business processes across organisations, creating competitive advantage from limited resources, allowing organisations to access the most qualified individuals for a particular job regardless of their location and better team outcomes (quality, productivity, and satisfaction), are the advantages of remote work and virtual teams that scholars have identified (Ebrahim et al. 2009: 2657–2658). Furthermore, Wayne Cascio (2000: 85) has also identified five main disadvantages of virtual teams:

- Lack of physical communication;
- Loss of face-to-face synergies;
- Lack of trust;
- Concern on predictability and reliability;
- Lack of social interaction.

Scholars have also identified seven factors for success of remote work (Serrat 2009: 3):

- Human resources policies;
- Training and on-the-job education and development;
- Standard organisational and team processes;
- Use of electronic collaboration and communication technology;
- Organisational culture;
- Leadership support for virtual teams;
- Team-leader and team-member competencies.

1.1. Input-process-outcome framework (IPO)

To function effectively, the IPO is a valuable theoretical framework that defines the key inputs, processes and outcomes for virtual teams (Ilgen et al. 2005: 527). According to Daniel Ilgen et al.

the IPO framework assumes that input factors influence team emergent states and process factors, and that emergent states and processes impact team outcomes and mediate the relationship between input factors and team outcomes (Ilgen et al. 2005: 531).

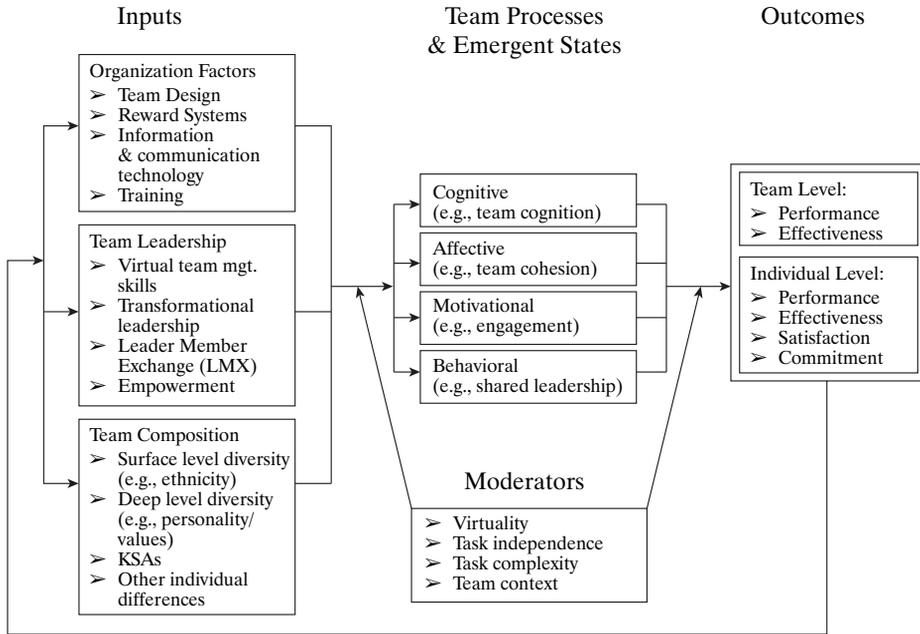
From the beginning the IPO was created and applied to make research for face-to-face teams, but nowadays the IPO model is also applied to study virtual teams. The IPO framework offers to recognise the essential factors, which is important for face-to-face or virtual teams in order to improve their efficiency and performance. See Figure 1.

The input category includes organisational, team leadership and team composition factors. The organizational level component includes such variables as team design, reward system, information and communication technology and training. In the design of virtual teams these variables represent organisational actions (Hoch, and Dulebohn 2017a: 569–570).

The second input factor is leadership. This includes leaders with advanced communication skills, strong knowledge of digital technologies, ability to promote team member participation, cultural diversity awareness, establishing trust in employees, who are geographically dispersed (Hoch, and Dulebohn 2017a: 570).

Figure 1

Input-process-outcome model of virtual teams



Source: Hoch, and Dulebohn 2017: 571.

The third category in team composition, according to Julia Hoch, and James Dulebohn represents

both surface level and deep level diversity and individual differences, which are expected to impact team processes and outcomes (Hoch, and Dulebohn 2013: 118).

The processes and emergent states category means the mediators between the input and outcomes components. The team processes refer to the interdependent acts of team members that transform inputs into outcomes. The team emergent states come out from complex team process interaction. The emergent states and processes include cognitive, affective, motivational and behavioural processes: cognitive processes such as team cognition, affective processes such as team coherence, motivational processes such as commitment to teamwork and finally the behavioural processes, for example shared leadership and technology usage (Hoch, and Dulebohn 2017a: 571–572).

Hoch and Dulebohn have identified such moderators as a component of processes and emergent states categories. According to the scholars

these include factors that may moderate the input and team process pathway as well as the team process and outcomes pathway by affecting the direction and/or strength of the relationships in the model (Hoch, and Dulebohn 2017a: 572).

The moderator components are virtuality, team context, task complexity and interdependence.

The final component of the IPO framework is outputs. The outputs reflect the results of processes that turn team inputs into organisationally valued outcomes. This includes a team level, such as performance and effectiveness components and an individual level, such as performance, effectiveness, satisfaction and commitment aspects (Hoch, and Dulebohn 2017a: 572).

According to the scholars, trust, leadership, communication and technology have significant impact on success and effectiveness of remote work.

1.2. Trust

In the era of e-commerce and also for virtual teams, establishing trust in online transactions is a serious challenge (Kimble 2011: 10). Jarvenpaa et al. (2004: 255) argue that trust has direct as well as mediating impact on team effectiveness. Kaisa Henttonen, and Kirsimarja Blomqvist (2005: 107–119) think that trust in virtual teams is the key component to achieve high quality team effectiveness. They believe that trust helps in building commitment and cohesion. Additionally, it makes it possible to develop new ideas. Trust helps team members to concentrate on a given task and maximise their contribution in order to increase the organisation productivity (Bringas 2008: 28).

Pauleen (2003: 117) thinks that virtual teams need to have trust in order to operate. Scholars agree it is important to build trust and managers must use the following strategy (Ford et al. 2017: 25–34):

- Develop and reinforce leadership skills in goal setting, rewarding, team appraisal, communication, team building, and conflict resolution components;
- ‘Train the leader in virtual skills such as recognition of technological aspects of communication, time zone and cultural variations across team members, unique events at team members’ localities, and early warning

signs of team conflict and team member isolation/withdrawal' (Ford et al. 2017: 33);

- Require that leaders have face-to-face communication with the team members;
- Train leaders to establish and have effective management systems;
- Leaders should organise virtual events in order to recognise team members' accomplishments;
- Leaders should include employees in organisational life to avoid the reaction of isolation.

According to Robert Ford et al. (2017: 25–34), to build trust in virtual team members through organisational cues, managers should:

- Establish formal policies, performance evaluation and recognition programmes;
- Announce team building, collaboration and formal leadership policy requirements;
- Define formal policies to ensure team activities;
- Arrange financial support for leaders to physically visit each team member at least annually;
- Require team meetings with virtual team members.

1.3. Communication

Without an effective communication system in the organisations effective teamwork becomes a challenge. While some elements of this issue can be solved by technical means, others are more deeply connected with how people work and are treated (Kimble 201: 11). Communication and collaboration are the two most important factors in remote work (Bringas 2008: 5). Researchers think that in the case of cultural differences the communication between teams will be difficult (Bringas 2008: 38).

Due to the fact that virtual team members work from different locations, communication has particular importance. Talking on the phone, teleconferencing, messaging, emailing, chatting on Skype, etc. are possible interaction methods of communication (Bhat et al. 2017: 35).

According to Merrill Warkentin, and Peggy Beranek

all the computer-mediated communication technologies face the same drawback due to the lack of verbal and non-verbal cues, compared to traditional face-to-face communication. The verbal cues (i.e. tone of voice, verbal hesitation, volume) and

non-verbal cues (i.e. facial expression, body movement, emotion) are however important sources to process information from team members for tasks (Warkentin, and Beranek 1999: 273–274).

Kaul Bhat et al. (2017: 35) thinks that remote work employees face obstacles such as lack of communication, social interaction and emotional expression. Human and technological issues must be managed efficiently in order to have high performance, high commitment, effective communication and cooperation within the company employees. The scholars also outline that individuals suffer absence of informal meetings during the remote work (Bhat et al. 2017: 35).

1.4. Leadership

The main function of a leader is to track team members' actions he and to react when appropriate. Leaders at the same time have to monitor the progress of task accomplishment and the team's performance. In the case of problem detection, a leader must collect full information in order to assess the essence of the problem and use this information to formulate efficient solutions (Hackman, and Walton 1986: 51–55).

According to Bell, and Kozlowski

monitoring functions include vigilance, diagnosing group deficiencies, data gathering skills, forecasting impending environmental changes, and information use in problem solving. Taking action includes preventing deleterious environmental changes or their effects, enabling performance situations, providing material resources, and developing and managing personnel resources (Bell, and Kozlowski 2002: 23–24).

Prina Shachaf, and Noriko Hara (2005: 97) think that virtual team leadership should have effective communication systems. In particular, a leader always clarifies tasks, engages in regular communication and provides feedback. Additionally, a leader appreciates team members' opinions and suggestions, cares about members' problems and expresses personal interest. A leader clearly defines remote work employees' responsibilities and mentors them. Leadership attitude, such as the caring nature, also plays a significant role.

John Adams (2001: 381–391) identifies five areas for successful management of dispersed teams:

- Management style – coaching and flexibility, results focus and technology tools.

- The remote employee – effective communication, commitment to be a team player, trustworthiness, discipline, independent work, and management skills.
- New employee orientation – it is important that managers provide employees with orientation and mentoring.
- Meetings – successful managers should aim to organise the minimum of quarterly face-to-face meetings, offer some informal time, video conferencing and communication.
- Teamwork – it is proposed that managers should have a clear charter for the team, agree on rules and procedures, define clear roles and responsibilities and understand a team’s specific goals.

The development of a fair reward system is also an important issue. Virtual team performance must be recognised and rewarded (Ebrahim et al. 2009: 2662).

1.5. Technology

Technology is a vital element (Bringas 2008: 26). In the last decades, with the rapid development of technology, work distributed by the media has become much easier, faster and more efficient. Additionally, the rapid development of new communications technologies such as the Internet has accelerated the trend so that today, organisations employ remote work (Hertel et al. 2005: 71). A team’s digital work involves sharing sensitive information and data over the Internet; as a result, security is often a cause for concern. Managers have to identify all level security needs for remote work employees (Ebrahim et al. 2009: 2662). See Table 1 for the tools and software that can make virtual job easier and facilitate communication.

Ford et al. (2017: 25–34) offer strategies for building effective virtual team through technological and organisational cues. The scholars give the following technological indications:

- Purchase, manage and upgrade the best available technology, because having connection and support has particular importance for employees who do remote work;
- Ensure that the technology used by virtual employees is completely compatible with the users’ and the organisation’s ones;
- Contingency plan for maintaining communication when there is a sudden breakdown;
- Team members should have access to supporting information systems;

- Setting and implementing requirements for communication (e.g. maximum response time);
- Adjust the transparent organisational information flow for virtual team members (e.g. SharePoint);
- Investment in conferencing.

Table 1

Tools and software’s used to organise remote work

Type of Tool	Type of Software
Chat	Slack, Twist, Google Hangouts
Project Management	Trello, Jira, Asana
Web and Video Conferencing	Google Meet, Zoom, Cisco Webex
Collaboration and Prototyping	Invision, Marvel, Adobe XD
Scheduling	Calendly, Doodle
Workflow Automation	Zapier, Microsoft Flow, Monday

Source: Harvard Professional Development 2018.

Remote work employees must have clear roles, because lack of visibility may cause virtual team members to feel less accountable for the results. It is important to have coordination mechanisms such as scheduling deadlines (Ebrahim et al. 2009: 2663).

Furthermore, Deborah Duarte, and Nancy Tennant Snyder (1999: 60–69) identified the strategies for managers in order to increase the effectiveness of information flow and shared responsibility:

- Managers have to focus on showing that they trust employees. They can do this by sharing information with the team members as fully and quickly as possible. It is also important to include the members in the decision-making process and acknowledge their contribution.
- Company managers must allow employees to see them behave virtually by modeling the actions they expect.
- Furthermore, when designing a collaboration strategy, managers must make sure that team members have access to compatible technologies.

The number of employees who are not working most of the time in the same location is increasing rapidly as the development in the technology have allowed to have a flexible work style. These changes have created a truly global economy. Nowadays it is not uncommon for managers to be in one place and their team in another location (Bringas 2008: 28).

2. METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

The aim of the survey was to establish the objectives, to determine the target population, to select the respondents and to prepare the questionnaire. This inquiry was designed to examine how employees in Georgia are working and what challenges they face.

A quantitative method of research was used to discover trends in thoughts and opinions. Methodologically, the work is based on an analysis of available literature and the results of statistical research based on the survey (some of the questions were multiple-choice) of a random sample of 187 respondents, employees of different Georgian private and public sector enterprises.

During the research, 187 public and private remote work employees were surveyed. 60% of the participants were women and 40% were men. Additionally, 50% of the participants were 20–30, 38% 31–40, 11% 41–50 and 1% over 51 years old. 53% of the respondents have a Master’s degree and 42% a Bachelor’s degree. It should be also noted that only 5% of them have a highest scientific degree. According to the survey, 54% of these employees have been working in the organisation for up to 5 years, 28% for 6 to 10 years and 18% for more than 10 years. See Table 2.

Table 2

Demographics of the employees – respondents

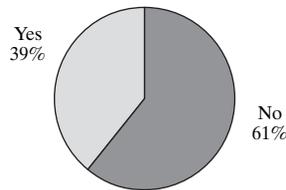
		Percentage
Gender	Male	40
	Female	60
Age	20–30	50
	31–40	38
	41–50	11
	Over 51	1
Education	Bachelor’s degree	42
	Master’s degree	53
	Highest scientific degree	5
Duration of working in the organization	0–5 year	54
	6–10 year	28
	11–15 year	14
	Over 17 year	4

Source: author’s own elaboration based on the survey.

68% of the employees find their organisations to provide a modern-liberal environment, 18% of them consider that there is traditional bureaucratic governance in their agencies and only 14% find it difficult to answer the question. One of the most important parts of the research was to examine if the respondents had a remote organisation and virtual teams' working experience. According to the data analysis, 61% of the respondents had no such experience before the COVID-19 pandemic. Only 39% of the respondents appeared to have a know-how and experience. See Figure 2.

Figure 2

Remote work experience

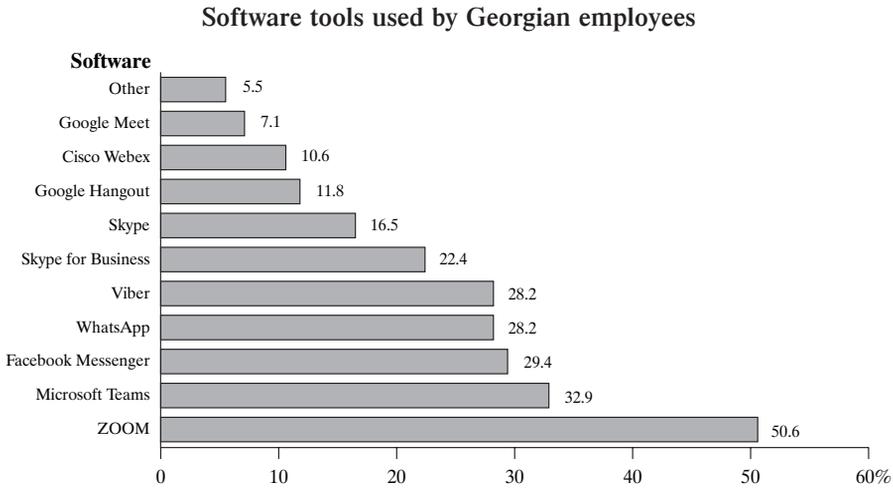


Source: author's own elaboration based on the survey.

The research aimed to find out which software tools the employees were using during the remote work. According to the research findings, 50.6% of the employees are using ZOOM, 32.9% – Microsoft Teams, 29.4% – Facebook Messenger, 28.2% – WhatsApp, 28.2% – Viber, 22.4% – Skype for Business, 16.5% – Skype, 11.8% – Google Hangout, 10.6% – Cisco Webex and 7.1% of the respondents are using Google Meet. Moreover, 5.5% of the respondents also noted that during the remote work they were using Slack, Ding Talk, Goto Meeting, BlueJeans, Bitrix 24 and Workplace. See Figure 3.

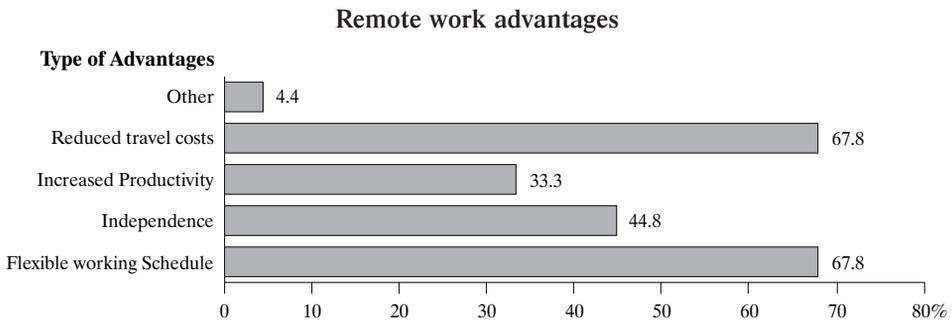
According to the survey, 60.9% of the employees were satisfied with remote working. The research also found out that a flexible working schedule, independence, increased productivity, no traffic jams, and better conditions at home were the advantages of remote working. See Figure 4. Furthermore, respondents also named all the disadvantages they have faced since they started working virtually.

Figure 3



Source: author’s own elaboration based on the survey.

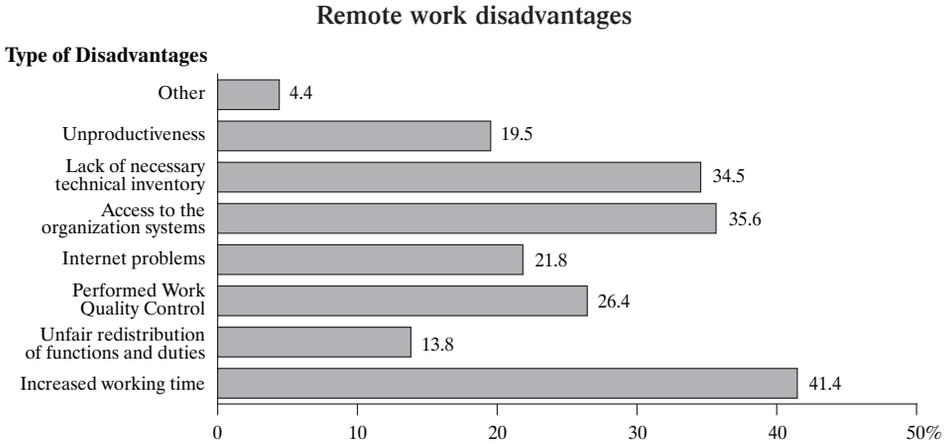
Figure 4



Source: author’s own elaboration based on the survey.

Answering the question whether the respondents face some disadvantages and challenges during the remote working process, in the first place, they (41.4%) named increased working time. In addition, they named unfair redistribution of functions and duties, quality control of the work performed, Internet problems, access to the organisation systems, lack of necessary technical inventory, unproductiveness, lack of face-to-face communication and their marital status (e.g. baby). See Figure 5.

Figure 5

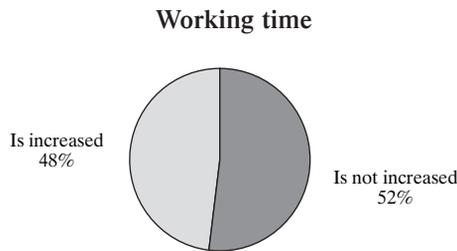


Source: author’s own elaboration based on the survey.

Furthermore, 39.1% of the respondents never and 50.6% of them rarely have Internet problems. Only 10.3% often appeared to have Internet problems.

The research aimed to find out if the working time during remote work and virtual teams’ work period was increased. According to the results, 52% of the respondents don’t think so and 48% assume that their working time increased. See Figure 6.

Figure 6

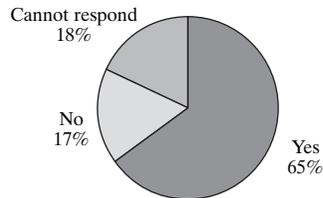


Source: author’s own elaboration based on the survey.

In the case of the question whether the respondents' duties and responsibilities are fairly distributed, 65% of the respondents feel that it is fair, 17% disagree and 18% of the respondents cannot answer the question. See Figure 7.

Figure 7

Fairly distributed duties and responsibilities



Source: author's own elaboration based on the survey.

Finally, 48.2% of the respondents totally and partially agree that in the process of working from remote location, the frequency of contact with the management or employees during non-working hours is being increased.

3. VIRTUAL TEAMS AND REMOTE WORK – FINDINGS

Technological development and globalisation have created the environment in which teams interact and collaborate across boundaries of time, geographic locations, and organisations. Today, in many organisations, most teamwork collaboration takes a virtual form.

Scholars argue that doing remote work and managing virtual teams is not about taking old management methods; it is rather about expanding the available tools in order to create the effective collaborative work. Some of the scholars also believe that the technological expertise is not a key factor for successful remote work. According to them, a key factor is a transparent and clear understanding of what it takes to get the company ready to conduct operations virtually.

Virtual teams are significantly different from traditional ones. Members of traditional teams work next to each other, while in virtual teams they work in different locations. Also, virtual teams rely on electronic communication. Most scholars think that managing and handling remote work and virtual teams is crucial.

Scholars state that the main advantages of remote work include: reduction of relocation time and travel costs, greater degree of freedom to individuals involved in the development of the projects, greater productivity, shorter development times, better outcomes and attraction of better employees, higher degree of cohesion, pollution reduction, creation and dispersion of

improved business processes across organisations, creation of the competitive advantage from limited resources, allowing organisations to access the most qualified individuals for a particular job regardless of their location, and better team outcomes (quality, productivity, and satisfaction). Scholars also identify main disadvantages of virtual teams: lack of physical communication, loss of face-to-face synergies, lack of trust, concern on predictability and reliability, and lack of social interaction.

Furthermore, scholars have also identified seven factors for remote work success: human resource policies, training and on-the-job education and development, standard organisational and team processes, use of electronic collaboration and communication technology, organisational culture, leadership support for virtual teams, and team-leader and team-member competencies.

Additionally, the IPO framework offers to recognise the essential factors, which is important for face-to-face or remote work in order to improve the efficiency and performance of employees.

There are many different variables that affect the remote work functioning, but collaborative behaviour such as communication, trust and leadership style can have a fundamental influence on it. It is also important to consider the differences in culture and time zones, which can affect virtual teams' performance.

In e-commerce and also for virtual teams, establishing trust in online transactions is a serious challenge. Scholars argue that trust has direct as well as mediating impact on team effectiveness. In addition, trust in remote work is a key component to achieve high quality team effectiveness. Scholars believe that trust helps to build commitment and cohesion. Additionally, it makes it possible to develop new ideas and creative new ways of thinking and problem solving. Trust helps team members to concentrate on a given task and maximise their contribution in order to maximise the organisation's productivity.

Remote work employees face obstacles such as lack of communication, social interaction and emotional expression. Human and technology related issues must be managed efficiently in order to have high performance, high commitment, effective communication and cooperation within the team members. Scholars also outline that individuals suffer absence of informal meetings during remote work.

Furthermore, virtual team leadership should have effective communication systems. In particular, a leader always clarifies tasks, engages in regular communication and provides feedback. Additionally, a leader appreciates team members' opinions and suggestions, cares about members' problems and

expresses personal interest. A leader clearly defines virtual team members' responsibilities and mentors them. Leaders also should think of a fair reward system development, because employees' remote work performance must be recognised and rewarded.

Technology is a vital element. In the last decades, with the rapid development of technology, work distributed via the media has become much easier, faster and more efficient. Digital teams' work includes sharing sensitive information and data over the Internet; as a result, security is often a cause for concern. Managers have to identify security at all levels.

During the research, 187 public and private remote work employees were surveyed. According to the data analysis, 61% of the respondents had no experience of remote working before the COVID-19 pandemic. The research found the following software tools that are used by Georgian remote work employees: ZOOM, Microsoft Teams, Facebook Messenger, Skype for Business, WhatsApp, Viber, Cisco Webex, Google Hangout, Google Meet. Moreover, 5.5% of the respondents also noted that during the remote work they were using Slack, Ding Talk, Goto Meeting, BlueJeans, Bitrix 24 and Workplace.

The research also found out that a flexible working schedule, independence, increased productivity, no traffic jams, and better conditions at home were the advantages of remote work. Furthermore, the respondents also named all the disadvantages they have faced since they started working virtually: increased working time, unfair redistribution of functions and duties, quality control of the work performed, Internet problems, access to the organisation systems, lack of necessary technical inventory, unproductiveness, lack of face-to-face communication and their marital status (e.g. baby).

According to the research findings, 54% of the respondents would like to continue to do remote work in the future and to be part of a virtual team, and 46% of them would like to return to the old, traditional working environment.

CONCLUSION

Remote work and virtual teams will constitute the future working environment and Georgian public and private companies must be ready to adjust to the situation and the demand of the market. Working from home to avoid the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic in the country has shown that we need to have a transparent strategy for remote work. According to

the research results, at the first attempt, the Georgian private and public companies more or less managed to meet the challenge. However, this is not enough and requires gradual development. Besides, managers need to work on minimising the existing challenges. In order to implement the above effectively, managers and employees must cooperate. Furthermore, it is already desirable that companies should establish quality control over the work performed as long as remote work is going to last.

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THE WORLD DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: REMOTE WORK AND VIRTUAL TEAMS IN GEORGIA

Abstract

The nature of work in today's organisations is becoming more and more complex, dynamic, and global. Nowadays, remote work and virtual teams have become a vital component of modern corporate organisations. The goal of the research is to examine some of the main problems that the Georgian public or private sector's remote employees have faced.

The main purpose of the paper is to determine the current remote work situation of the public or private sector employees in Georgia in accordance with the restrictions adopted by the country in order to reduce the threat of the coronavirus spread. In addition, the research seeks to identify and examine the factors that influence employees' remote work effectiveness and to determine under what conditions remote work and virtual teams can be a worthwhile investment in a public or private organization.

Studies have shown that employees doing remote work in Georgia face challenges, such as: increased working time, unfair redistribution of functions and duties, performed work quality control, internet problems, access to the organizational systems, lack of necessary technical inventory, unproductiveness and lack of face-to-face communication. Methodologically, the work is based on the analysis of available literature and the results of the statistical research based on the survey of 187 respondents, a random sample of different Georgian private and public sector employees.

Consequently, managers should be aware of modern communication, technology and leadership methods that can be used in effective and efficient

way to increase the virtual work quality. The article concludes that both the technological and the organisational approaches need to be addressed in parallel in order to work effectively.

Key words: remote work; virtual teams; technology; tools; communication; leadership; trust building

ŚWIAT PODCZAS PANDEMII COVID-19: PRACA ZDALNA I ZESPOŁY WIRTUALNE W GRUZJI

Streszczenie

Praca we współczesnym przedsiębiorstwie przybiera coraz bardziej złożony, dynamiczny i globalny charakter. Praca zdalna i zespoły wirtualne stały się obecnie niezbędnymi częściami składowymi nowoczesnych organizacji korporacyjnych. Badania mają na celu przeanalizowanie głównych problemów z jakimi zmierzyli się pracownicy gruzińskiego sektora publicznego i prywatnego.

Głównym celem artykułu jest określenie aktualnej sytuacji pracowników sektora publicznego i prywatnego w Gruzji w związku z pracą zdalną zgodnie z restrykcjami wprowadzonymi w kraju w celu ograniczenia zagrożenia rozprzestrzeniania się koronawirusa. Ponadto, badania mają na celu identyfikację i analizę czynników wpływających na efektywność pracowników świadczących pracę zdalnie oraz w jakich warunkach praca zdalna i wirtualne zespoły mogą być opłacalną inwestycją w przedsiębiorstwach sektora publicznego i prywatnego.

Badania wykazały, że przed pracownikami w zdalnym systemie pracy pojawiają się wyzwania takie jak wydłużony czas pracy, niesprawiedliwa redystrybucja funkcji i obowiązków, kontrola jakości wykonanej pracy, problemy z Internetem, dostęp do systemów organizacyjnych, brak potrzebnego wyposażenia technicznego, nieproduktywność oraz brak komunikacji bezpośredniej (twarzą w twarz). Jeśli chodzi o metodologię, niniejsze opracowanie jest oparte na analizie dostępnej literatury oraz wynikach badań statystycznych przeprowadzonych w oparciu o sondaż wybranych losowo 187 respondentów zatrudnionych w różnych gruzińskich firmach sektora publicznego i prywatnego.

W rezultacie, menadżerowie powinni mieć świadomość, jakie metody nowoczesnej komunikacji, technologii i przywództwa można efektywnie i sku-

tecznie stosować w celu poprawy jakości pracy wirtualnej świadczonej przez pracowników. Artykuł kończy konkluzja, że aby pracować skutecznie, należy równolegle stosować podejście technologiczne, jak i organizacyjne.

Słowa kluczowe: wirtualne zespoły, technologia, komunikacja, przywództwo, budowa zaufania

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