Teamwork during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The essential of presented paper is human resource management, especially the concept of teamwork in home office conditions, for which both the state and the private sector of the Czech Republic were not used before the declaring a state emergency to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The presented paper has a classical structuring of the scientific paper, it is divided into a theoretical part and an empirical part. The theoretical part of the paper is based on a critical analysis of relevant information sources, which we have chosen with regard to the topic of the paper and the timeliness of the information provided in the information source. To synthesize and generalize the outputs of the critical analysis of information sources, we used a procedure from general to specific. In the empirical part of the presented paper we apply the information obtained to teams from the private sector and teams from the public sector. Using a questionnaire survey, we compare these two groups of teams in the areas of the concept of teamwork, team functionality, team management by its leader and motivation to perform in the context of the preparedness of the analyzed teams for home office. We found that greater negativity of teamwork as less productivity, or more demanding communication, is perceived by people from a private sector. Increased work from home in the private sector has improved communication and, in the public sector, work efficiency. In public sector, there is more frequent work control and feedback.

1- Introduction

It is the employees who contribute to the achievement of the company's goals, and therefore the people working in the organization are the most valuable capital that the company has. Their management then represents a strategic and logically thought-out approach. In general, the goal of this area is to ensure that the organization successfully fulfils its goals through employees, whether it is the intentions of the project or the goals of the company as such (e.g. the effectiveness of the organization).

One of the progressive and highly sought-after tools in the field of human resources management is the teamwork. Building a successful team and managing it well is a prerequisite for successful human resource management. In the presented paper we focus on human resource management, especially on the concept of teamwork in home office conditions, for which both the state and the private sector of the Czech Republic were not used before the declaring a state emergency to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

The presented paper has a classical structuring of the scientific paper, it is divided into a theoretical part and an empirical part. The theoretical part of the paper is based on a critical analysis of relevant information sources, which we have chosen with regard to the topic of the paper and the timeliness of the information provided in the information

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source. To synthesize and generalize the outputs of the critical analysis of information sources, we used a procedure from general to specific. All used information sources are listed in the References.

In the empirical part of the presented paper we apply the information obtained to teams from the private sector and teams from the public sector. Using a questionnaire survey, we compare these two groups of teams in the areas of the concept of teamwork, team functionality, team management by its leader and motivation to perform in the context of the preparedness of the analyzed teams for home office. The metodology scheme is shown in the figure (see Figure 1).

The global pandemic of COVID-19 caused by a new type of coronavirus affects the lives of all of us and around the world, interfering with private life, sports activities for children and adults, our children's education and, above all, working life. Aspects that affect our work performance, and which will affect it in the future, have not yet been studied in detail, analyzes and researches in this area are yet to emerge, the results of these researches are still too general, however, with this paper we will try to clarify those aspects of working life, which concern a significant share of the Czech working population and that is teamwork in the conditions of a home office. Due to the temporary absence of any scientific outputs on this topic, we consider our results to be innovative.
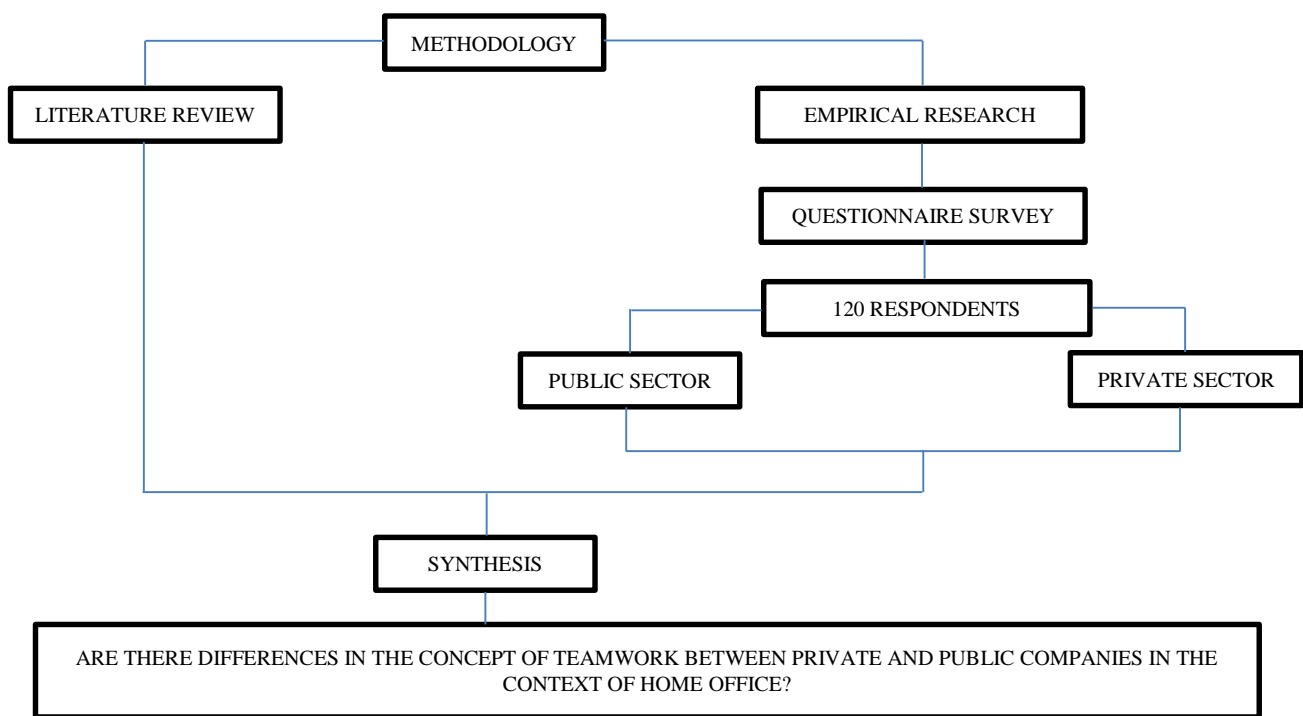

Figure 1. Methodology Scheme.

2- Problem Formulation and Methodology

As a research method we chose a questionnaire survey with the main research question "Are there differences in the concept of teamwork between the private and public companies in the context of home office?".

The basic problem areas of this research problem are the concept of teamwork, conditions for working from home and team leadership in the private and public sector in the context of home office. The aim of the questionnaire survey is to find out, whether teamwork has created better conditions for home office in the private sector than in the public sector. We then examine this hypothesis in the following areas:

- H1: Teamwork in the private sector is better evaluated by team members.
- H2: Teamwork in the private sector has created better conditions for home office.
- H3: Teamwork in the private sector has created better conditions in terms of leadership and motivation.

After studying professional literature sources on this issue, we focused on the selection of companies from both sectors, which could be compared according to certain criteria. In the original intention of planning the goal and outputs of the empirical probe, the questionnaire survey was supplemented by methods of qualitative research, namely semi-structured interviews with employees of companies in both sectors. These would then further expand and supplement the work with observations that cannot be affected by the nature of the questionnaire survey. Unfortunately, due to the social situation caused by the state emergency following the COVID-19 pandemic, we were only able to conduct a questionnaire survey. We are aware of the limited informative value of this survey.

However, the questionnaire survey, as one form of quantitative research, also has several advantages, such as higher speed of data collection and small time costs. When creating the questionnaire, we first defined the categories in which we intended to examine the differences. Subsequently, we filled each section with several questions and then tested them on test respondents to see if the questions are understandable and thus achieve the aspects examined. We adjusted the questions several times in response to this process (12 trial respondents). We used Google Forms to implement the questionnaire and sent a link to this questionnaire with a request for completion to the analyzed companies. Data collection took 6 days.

The problematic area of evaluation in the field of the concept of teamwork was identified by the questions:

- How effective will your current teamwork come to you?
- On a scale from 1 (regularly) to 5 (not at all), rate how the following characteristics appear in your teamwork.
- Check what positives do you perceive in your teamwork?
- Check what negatives do you perceive in your teamwork?

The following issues examined the problem area regarding the team's functionality in the current situation and readiness for the home office.

- On a scale from 1 to 5 rate how working from home has affected aspects of your teamwork, where 1 - improved, 2 - slightly improved, 3 - did not change, 4 - slightly worsened, 5 - worsened.
- What technologies do you use now to communicate with the team?
- Did working in your current company prepare you to work with the technology?

Other questions then identified problems in the management of teams by their leaders.

- How many times a week is your work led directly by the manager? / How many times a week do you perform a direct inspection of your team's work?
- On a scale from 1 (excellent) to 5 (very poor), how would you rate your team's leadership?
- How often is provided a feedback to you? / How often do you provide feedback to your team?
- On a scale from 1 (maximum) to 5 (minimum), how would you rate the following aspects that motivate you the most at work?

We received answers from 120 respondents from both sectors. There were 57 respondents from the private sector, mostly men aged 27 to 39. In the public sector, where we received answers from 63 respondents, the gender of respondents was balanced. More than half of them were aged 40 and over. To evaluate the data obtained by the questionnaire survey, we used the basic methods of descriptive statistics, we worked with frequency. To better visualize the results, we used graphs processed in MS Excel, where we have already dealt with the percentage values of the obtained outputs.

3- Overview of the Current State of the Issue

The team represents an unstructured group of people who need to be led, as Bočková (2013) or Sridharan and Boud (2019) stated [1, 2]. The essence of the team is to achieve the goal together [3]. The people in the team thus correspond to each other and have a very strong sense of belonging, unlike group [4]. The team promotes complementarity and together helps to develop the skills of both members and the whole group [5].

Whether or not to work in a team often provokes many discussions. It should be noted that not for every company or department is teamwork a suitable tool. And although it is the teamwork that most companies are now promoting, as we can read in the study *Trends in Human Capital 2019 in the Czech Republic and in the world* by Deloitte [6], where 82% of companies surveyed claim that cooperation in teams has helped to improve the performance. But some companies may be more beneficial to individual work. The big advantage of individual work is a smaller share of time that we would put into discussion with colleagues. The absence of conflicts and arguments is connected with this. No one refutes our ideas and only we put our own confidence in our decisions [7]. Another advantage is that we are assigned all credits for work [8]. You also don't have to tie yourself to others and wait for them to give you the part you need. Individual work is better for artists, designers or programmers who focus directly on creating code [9]. On the other hand, such work brings with it more stress, which is imposed on the individual [10]. Likewise, the time required to work on a task can be very exhausting. Although quick decisions are positive, one is alone at work and therefore needs more time [11].

Working in a team brings a lot of creative ideas and solutions that an individual would not have to come up with. Colleagues motivate us more and force us to think in other patterns, which can again lead to the innovative ideas. The work on the task is then divided among the members, so the time spent on the project is shorter. Each member then has different characteristics, which increases the efficiency of the team [12]. A team is a suitable tool if our goal is a project

or product that requires more opinions and attitudes [13]. Teamwork is constantly influenced by time. Human requirements change every moment, and in addition to try to meet these requirements, companies are still trying to increase their productivity and efficiency [14-16].

We often encounter team failures in organizations. Whether it is a dysfunction or a complete decay, failure is an ever-repeating activity [17]. A study by the Czech branch of Deloitte *Trends in Human Capital 2019* [6], to which 106 business and HR leaders from the Czech Republic responded, highlighted the three most common problems that prevent the development of a team or lead to its end. As many as 45% of respondents cited the lack of knowledge of leaders on how to lead a team as the most common barrier. In second place, with 41%, respondents criticized the functioning of the team, which is not supported by adequate employee performance management. Insufficient technology was a third obstacle, which was agreed by up to 34%. These three barriers would be supplemented by a recurring problem, not only in our country, but also in the world of rewarding team members [18, 19]. We face the most common obstacle, which is inappropriate leadership, both here and in the world. Kotter (2015) states [20] that 70-90% of weaknesses in teamwork are leadership. Many companies are unaware of the importance of performance management, which is lacking in their organization. Most of them do not even have a clear idea of what the term leadership means [21, 22].

Companies are constantly trying to motivate their employees in some way. Whether with benefits like flexible working hours, just four working days, free rewards, or training options. There are really many benefits that companies offer. It seems that most companies are trying to avoid an above-standard increase in the basic wage, even though it is the pay that motivates the current generation the most. On the contrary, flexibility and corporate benefits are among the motivating currencies in the Czech Republic, which is a distinction, for example, compared to Germany, where flexibility comes first and is even more important than monetary reward or bonus payments [23]. In Russia, the main motivators outside of salary and workload, are especially bonuses, possible training and development [24]. According to the Generation Y and Z Generation Survey [25], which was answered by 1,624 respondents, in addition to salaries, companies should focus on motivators as an opportunity for career growth or the opportunity to learn something new. This is particularly motivating for more than 30% of Z-generation respondents, who are now flooding the labor market.

As many as 57% of a Deloitte study [6] respondents claim that remuneration is really important. However, only a quarter of respondents are ready to fundamentally change remuneration. The respondents see the biggest problem in the possible unfair perception of valuing individuals. We feel this barrier more in our country than in the world. On the contrary, we do not see a problem at all in not understanding the needs of employees, which, on the contrary, are often perceived by companies abroad. Other barriers include legislative requirements and union restrictions, lack of funding, or insufficient support for change.

4- Results and Discussion

In the first section, where we examined the concept of teamwork, in the context of home office, we found that in both sectors, private and public, there are both team and group characters and it is so difficult to say exactly whether it is a team or group. In the public sector, for example, the majority agrees with the personal responsibility of the manager, but at the same time disagrees with the formal procedures. The situation is similar in the private sector, where most of them are inclined to share responsibility for the result, but the same majority then feel formal. The big surprise were the negatives that the respondents perceived in teamwork. Especially in the private sector, where most respondents agreed on lower productivity, more demanding communication and suppression of individuality. People from the public sector perceived the negative effects of teamwork less in the context of home office, and some did not even feel the negatives.
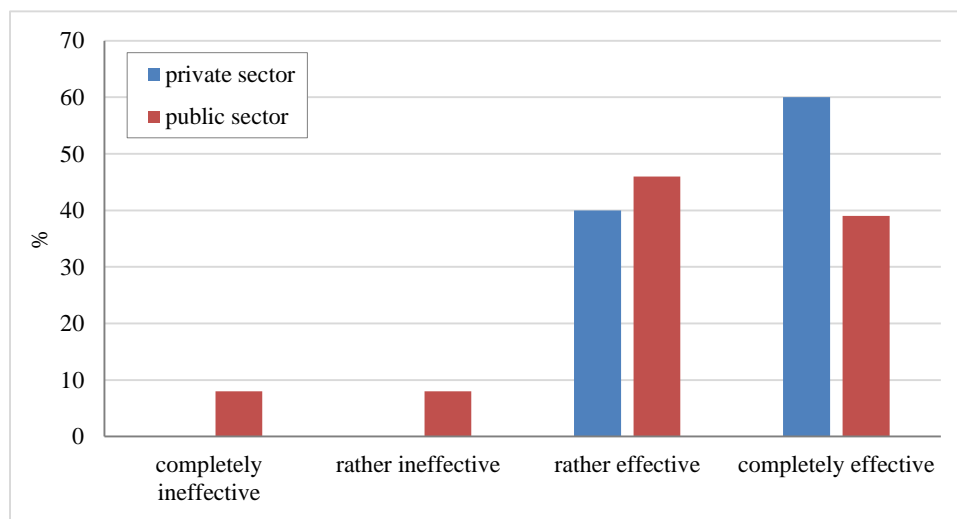

Figure 2. How effective will your current teamwork come to you?

In general, there is more positive perception of team ownership in the private sector than in a public sector. Even so, in the public sector, teamwork is assessed more as effective (see Figure 2).
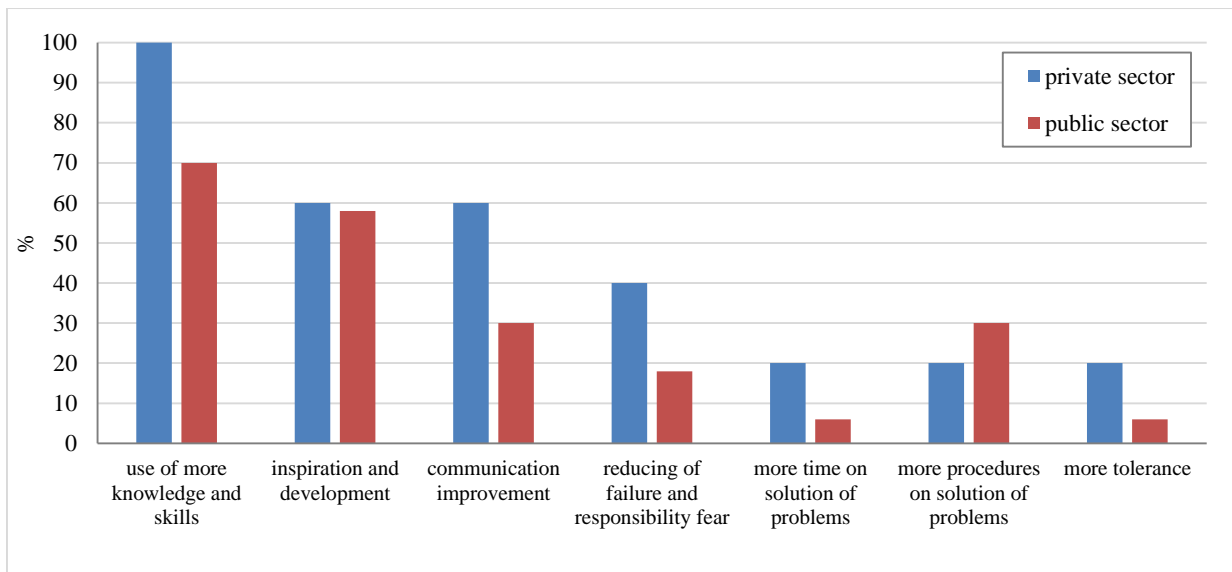

Figure 3. What positives do you perceive in your teamwork?

From the results (Figure 3) we can say that in both sectors the main positive is the perceived use of more knowledge and skills. Furthermore, inspiration and development and, in the private sector, even communication improvements. In the public sector, so many respondents disagree with the latter. On the contrary, compared to the private sector, people in the public sector then feel more as positive problem-solving procedures. Among the positives, the respondents in a private sector also mentioned the ability to achieve better results and handle multiple tasks at once.
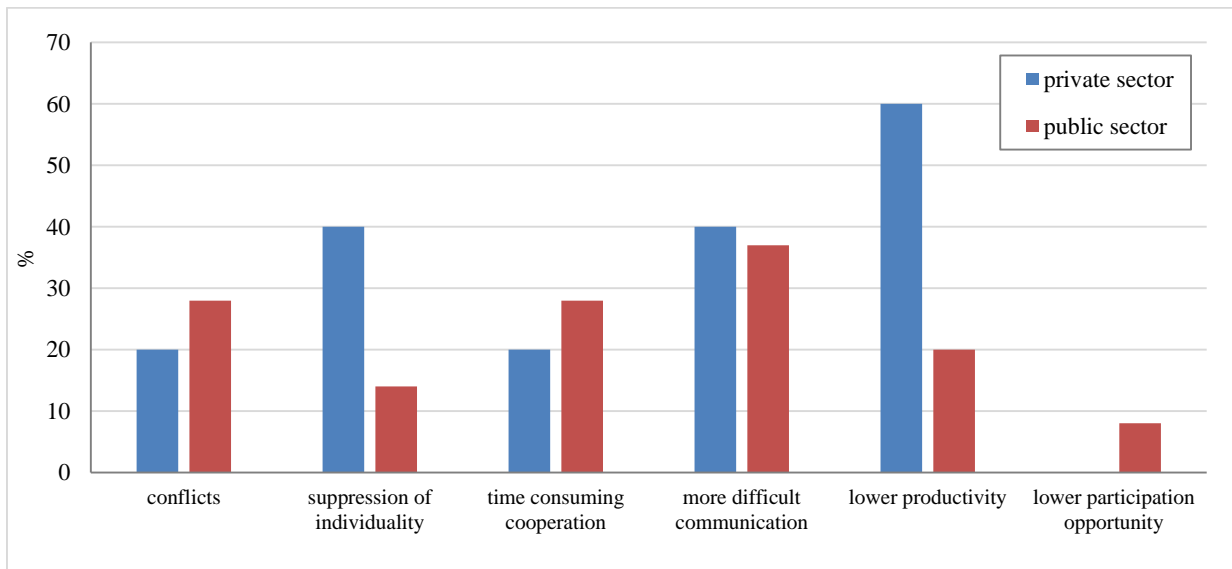

Figure 4. What negatives do you perceive in your teamwork?

From Figure 4 we can see the negatives affecting the teamwork. More than half of the respondents from a private sector agreed on lower productivity. Further then in this sector people perceive a lot the suppression of individuality as well as in the public sector even more demanding communication. Conflicts and time-consuming cooperation are less perceived, but so these negatives are probably perceived in both sectors.

Another area examined was the impact of increased work from home, caused by the current state emergency. In the private sector, the only change was felt in communication, which, according to team members, improved. For public sector, smaller part also felt an improvement in this area, and a large part felt an improvement in work efficiency, which was commented on by one respondent from the public sector as follows: *"In my opinion, the increase in efficiency is caused by smaller number of meetings and phone calls, which significantly disrupt work. Online meetings are then even more productive."* In the remaining areas, which are team leadership, motivation and feedback, they do not feel a change in any sector. Results we can see on Figure 5:
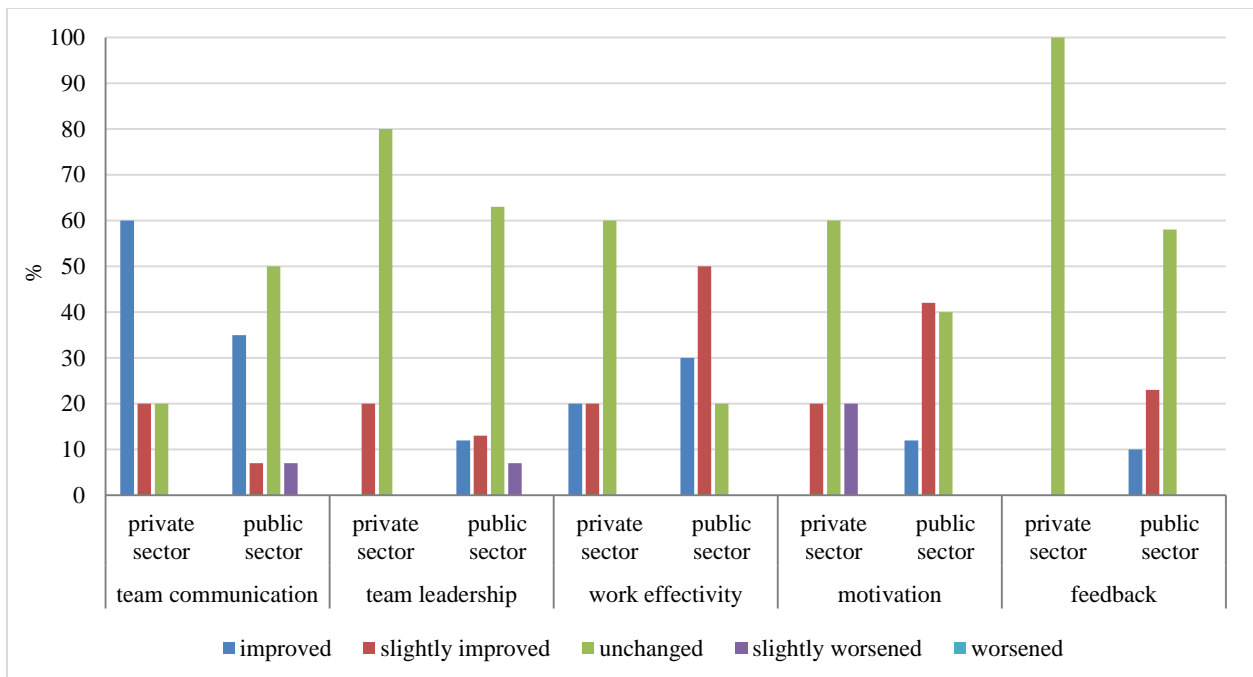
Figure 5. Impacts of increased home office.

Within this area, we also found out what communication tools the company uses. The result was mainly Microsoft Teams and Skype applications, although the use of the first mentioned application is limited in the state enterprise due to the small number of licenses that the organization has. In the third area of leadership and motivation, it can generally be said that the state sector has more regular feedback and control of work.

In contrast to the private sector, in the public sector, direct control by managers is carried out more regularly. In the private sector, management is more likely once or several times a week. Some private sector respondents add that control is more as needed, based on the required tasks (see results on Figure 6).
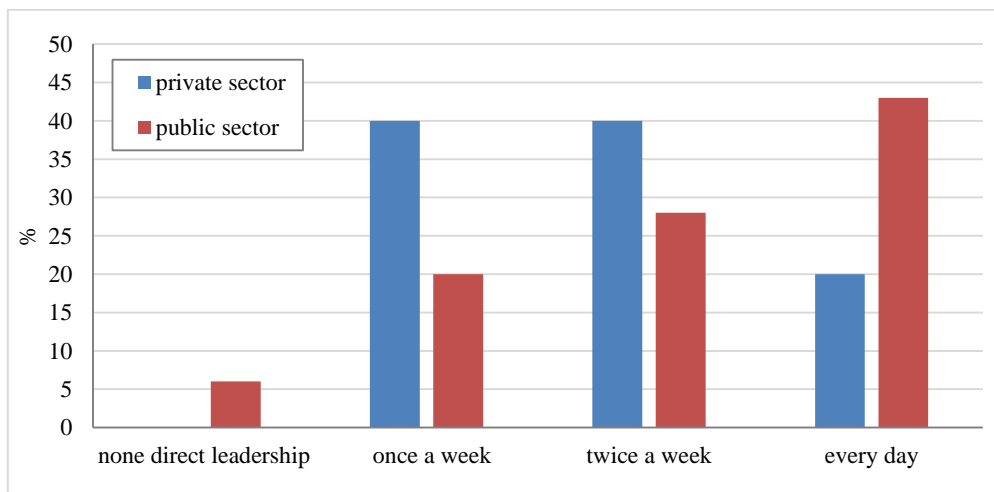

Figure 6. Frequency of direct leadership.

The sectors differ more in motivation. Although both sectors have agreed that the company's benefits are not sufficient motivators, people from the state sphere rate career advancement as less motivating, which, on the contrary, is well valued in the private sector. This reason was again commented by one respondent: *"Less motivating career advancement in our country can be caused by the fact that the higher positions are more time consuming and more political, which also brings instability and uncertainty that a person will not be fired and therefore, for example, I am no longer attracted to a higher position itself."* Thanks to this, the sector is deprived of a great motivator and should focus on its improvement. Motivators in the public sector include team leaders, colleagues, salary and job description. In the private sector, it is career advancement, job description, salary and ambition.

The results were surprising to us in many ways. For responses from the private sector, we have often encountered indecisive options such as: *I cannot determine or do not know*, which evaluations often made difficult. The frequency of these responses may have been based on distrust of the investigation as such in the context of anonymisation of data,

or misuse, of possibly ill-formulated questions, or of the period at which the survey was conducted. On the contrary, in the public sector, the answers were mostly clear.

Based on the conducted survey, we can then evaluate the formulated hypothesis, although we are aware of the limited informative value of this survey, the results can be an interesting stimulus for deeper research. For the first sub-area of the hypothesis, which is H1: Teamwork in the private sector is better evaluated by team members, so we can say that the evaluation of team effectiveness was the same in both sectors and did not make much difference, nor was it perceived general positive teamwork in the context of home office. On the contrary, respondents from the public sector perceive fewer negatives of teamwork than the other sector, so this hypothesis cannot be confirmed.

The second sub-area of the hypothesis is as follows: H2: Teamwork in the private sector has created better conditions for home office, then we must also refute it. The public sector does not feel any deterioration in any way in response to work from home, on the contrary, compared to the private sector, it feels an improvement in work efficiency.

The third sub-area of the hypothesis: H3: Teamwork in the private sector has created better conditions in terms of leadership and motivation, cannot be confirmed again because direct leadership and feedback in the public sector is more regular than in the private sector and leadership evaluation is similarly positive in both sectors. The conditions for motivation are then not satisfactory in any sector. For the given hypothesis: H: Teamwork has created better conditions in the private sector than in the state sector, then on the basis of previous partial conclusions it can be stated that the prediction formulated by the hypothesis was not confirmed in the questionnaire survey.

5- Conclusions

The aim of the paper was to analyse selected aspects and approaches to working with a team, to apply the aspects to the private and public sector and to compare whether and how these aspects differ in these areas with regard to the need to work in the home office mode, which Czech companies in the private and public sectors were not and still are not prepared, nevertheless they had to order and implement this regime of work after the declaration of a state emergency in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19 disease. Using a questionnaire survey, we then fulfilled this intention. Within this research method, we formulated a research question together with a hypothesis, which we were then surprisingly forced to refute.

The most important aspects would then be the need not to underestimate the virtual teams, which are now on the rise even more than before, and companies could then encounter the problems that this trend brings. Likewise, organizations should prepare for the new needs of the current Z generation, which is gradually flooding the labour market and not to ignore the trend of superwork and talent mobility.

It should also be noted that in these analysed sectors we focused only on a small part of companies not affecting the entire national economy of the Czech Republic. However, what the empirical part confirmed was the insufficient remuneration that causes motivation. In the context of home office, it is even more exposed than ever before to a demanding test, and although these are the benefits that organizations offer the most, they are also the least motivating factor. Surprising was the area of communication, which also belongs to the crisis.

Of particular interest, however, was the finding that the greater negativity of teamwork in the context of home office as less productivity, or more demanding communication, is perceived by employee from the private sector. Increased work from home in the private sector has improved communication and, in the public sector, work efficiency. In the public sector, there is more frequent labour inspections and feedback. The difference with some motivators was also surprising and it is so important to be able to motivate people in different sectors correctly.

Due to the objectification of our conclusions in the context of teamwork in the COVID-19 period, we had a significant tendency to compare these conclusions with the results and outputs of other relevant surveys and researches. We state that this time of COVID-19 brings not only in our lives, but also in the world of management, whether companies from the private or public sector, a number of unknowns. Among the many current unknowns, it is not yet known how badly the global economy will be affected and how quickly it will recover. Notwithstanding the unknowns, it is obvious that COVID-19 will be recognized for changing the ways people work in fundamental ways. Kniffin et al. (2021) research [26] brings summary of implications, issues for future research, and insights for action regarding COVID-19 and the workplace. We note that we found very similar results in our research, which Kniffin et al. present in Table 1 in their [26] study. They state, for example, that COVID-19 abruptly accelerated the speed of changes associated with working outside of colocated settings. Virtual work practices are likely to spread as organizations realize the cost-savings from structuring labor with fewer full-time employees and more contractors connected technologically [27] - and perhaps with less office space in light of the health risks known to be associated with conventional open-plan offices [28].

Last year, Waizenegger (2020) in [29] also dealt with the issue of teamwork in the COVID-19 period in relatively detail. The COVID-19 context in their study provides a unique picture of enforced and unprepared working from home

scenario that applied to all with restricted mobilities and social interactions with a focus on the organisational, behavioural, and societal impacts of the pandemic and information systems. This unique context contributes to a new understanding of remote e-working literature and not only offers empirical understandings of how knowledge workers adapt, negotiate and struggle with the sudden changes of the affordance shift, but also broadens the scope of the work from home literature beyond the voluntary nature. Many findings in the existing literature do not hold true in the idiosyncratic remote e-working conditions that knowledge workers are facing during the pandemic. The benefits of working from home in the existing remote e-working literature might not be applicable to the COVID-19 context.

Our findings show that employees often have to work in home environments that may jeopardise the original benefits such as reduced distractions or increased productivity and affects team collaboration negatively. Further, a typical challenge of pre-COVID-19 remote workers was professional isolation. However, our data shows that all formal and social communications now take place through digital channels which allows pre-COVID-19 remote workers to be socially and professionally integrated. These results are confirmed by Waizenegger (2020) [29] as well.

The challenges for individuals working in this manner are clear, as presented in Tannenbaum et al. (2020) [30] and according to our results we agree: more people will need to learn to work in ways far different than how previous generations worked. In this respect, COVID-19 makes clear the vulnerability that employees and employers face. As many businesses around the world will be restructured or disappear due to the pandemic, workers will be retrained or laid off and the economic, social–psychological, and health costs of these actions are likely to be immense. Indeed, the impacts of the pandemic will affect some groups of workers more strongly than others, for example, based on their age, race and ethnicity, gender, or personality [30].

An understanding of how these abruptly emergent changes unfold is important for practitioners who are charting paths forward to address (e.g., with new interventions) the needs of vulnerable categories of employees. For instance, workers living alone may have very different virtual working needs and routines than employees living with family members. Also, more authoritarian or bossy leaders may face different challenges in motivating their workers in virtual environments than more participative and empathic team leaders, and thus have different training and development needs. Finally, in dealing with remote working populations, HR professionals must develop new performance management and appraisal systems while occupational health staff should be trained to recognize mental health issues in remote working populations—and be able to offer online advice and therapy [31]. Other relevant outputs dealing with the issue of teamwork include Sidpra et al., Zhang et al. and Bartsch et al. (2020) studies [32-34] and undoubtedly confirm the results of our research.

5-1- Limitation and Data Availability

Due to the current situation of state emergency measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we were forced to abandon the original intention of supplementing the questionnaire survey with semi-structured interviews. We also encountered another problem due to an emergency situation, when people from a private company were less willing to fill in the questionnaire due to more work. It should also be noted that in the analyzed sectors, we focused only on a small part of companies that do not affect the entire national economy of the Czech Republic. We are therefore aware of the limited informative value of this survey.

6- Declarations

6-1- Author Contributions

Conceptualization, D.L. and D.P.; methodology, D.L. and D.P.; writing—original draft preparation, D.L. and D.P.; writing—review and editing, D.L. and D.P. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

6-2- Funding

6-3- Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of this manuscript. In addition, the ethical issues, including plagiarism, informed consent, misconduct, data fabrication and/or falsification, double publication and/or submission, and redundancies have been completely observed by the authors.

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