



**INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL
OF ECONOMICS KAZGUU**

International School of Economics

Aldash Anar
Kozhamzhar Gulzira
Namerov Alikhan

**Transformation of Human Resource Management practices under COVID-19 crisis: employee
engagement and motivation**

Thesis submitted for
the degree of Bachelor in
6B04106 Management

Supervisor: Dilbar Gimranova, MPhil, MBA

Nur-Sultan, 2022

Abstract

The coronavirus pandemic has affected everyone and, therefore, is primarily considered as a human crisis. The lack of live communication, physical office and workspace affected the fact that employees stopped feeling involved in the workflow. All processes were transferred to an online format, companies experienced shock and uncertainty about how to manage people, their motivation and involvement remotely.

This research allows us to understand how companies remotely maintain motivation and manage employee engagement and effectiveness. For this study qualitative and quantitative research methods were used in the form of semi-structured interviews and convenience sampling survey among Kazakhstani HR-managers and employees appropriately. As a result, it became clear that motivation among employees increased only at the very beginning of the pandemic, workers saw a wide range of advantages from the new work format. However, when the negative sides appeared in the form of blurred boundaries, household barriers, lack of self-discipline and communication with colleagues, there was stress and stagnation in productivity and motivation of employees. Therefore, summing up, the results of the study showed that motivation during the pandemic period fell down gradually and the transformation of HR practices became the outcome of this.

Key words: *Human Resource Management, remote work, motivation, engagement, pandemic, Kazakhstan*

Table of contents

1. Introduction	5
1.1 Research questions	7
1.2 Research significance	7
1.3 Research hypotheses	7
2. Literature review	8
2.1 Employee motivation	8
2.2 Motivation and remote work	9
2.3 Kazakhstani companies during the pandemic	10
3. Methodology	11
4. Research results and findings	12
4.1 Survey results	12
4.2 Interview results	15
5. Discussions and recommendations	20
6. Problems and limitations	21
Conclusion	21
Bibliography	24
Appendices	26
Appendix A	26
Appendix B	31

List of abbreviations

HR - Human Resources

HRM - Human Resource Management

COVID-19 - Corona Virus Disease 2019

EY - Ernst & Young

CUSK - Corporate University of Samruk Kazyna

FMCG - Fast Moving Consumer Goods

HoReCa - Hotel, Restaurant, Catering/Café

KPI - Key Performance Indicator

WFH - Work From Home

1. Introduction

In any company, employees are by far the most valuable and lasting asset. In order for the company to continue to develop and be successful, it needs to focus on innovative methods of human resources management practices that will bring real benefits to achieve the overall goals of the company. Such practices include planning and organizing goals for employees in order to measure their effectiveness, creating special programs for skills development, and conducting motivational programs. All of this serves as the basis for the entire practice of human resources management.

Coronavirus disease which first appeared in the Chinese city of Wuhan in early December 2019, has quickly spread over the world, with confirmed cases in nearly every country, and has become a new major worldwide public health crisis (Mohan BS, 2020). Given the rapid spread of the COVID-19 virus, governments of almost all countries of the world have applied a number of security measures, such as social distancing, isolation, quarantine, temporary closure of schools, universities, enterprises and non-governmental organizations. Most representatives of small and medium-sized businesses could not withstand the pressure of the situation, their losses began to exceed all possible sizes, and it was no longer possible to maintain staff. Under the circumstances, the coronavirus pandemic has complicated the conduct of all HRM processes. Many companies switched to a remote work format, thanks to technologies that allowed employees to perform their work duties from home.

According to the latest data, as of the end of 2021, 988313 cases of infection with the COVID-19 virus were detected in Kazakhstan (Kazinform, 2022). Enterprises and businesses in Kazakhstan have also transferred many employees to a remote work format. Organizations were quickly forced to adapt to the new work environment, and HR departments had to be transformed in accordance with the new realities, so that the organization's activities are not suspended, and nothing prevents companies from developing further. HR management methods and strategies, including employee motivation, maintaining employee engagement and tracking performance, were among the main challenges for HR managers.

Employee motivation is the main issue that we will investigate in our work, because due to the change in the working environment, many factors affecting employee motivation and engagement have

changed. Such as the atmosphere that was no longer divided between home and work: disruptions, noise, household duties and responsibilities or in contrast comfortable home conditions that also could interfere with concentration. As well as lack of communication with colleagues and managers, insufficient technical equipment and other factors that influence motivation, and, accordingly, satisfaction from the workflow during pandemic time period.

We surveyed employees, to find out how they feel in isolation, how they assess the format of remote work and what was with their productivity. Also interviewed HR managers about their experience, how companies in Kazakhstan have transformed their HR strategies, what new trends we see in the practice of motivating employees at a distance and what are their forecasts regarding the future formats of working modes.

1.1 Research questions

RQ1: How has the pandemic affected the engagement and motivation of employees in Kazakhstan?

RQ2: How have Kazakhstani companies supported their personnel during remote work?

1.2 Research significance

The importance of this research is to identify the changes in employee motivation methods that appeared under the influence of COVID-19 crisis. This study will indicate whether the companies in Kazakhstan were ready for changes in HR management strategies, how they got out of the pandemic crisis and what is happening inside the companies now.

1.3 Research hypotheses

H1: The remote work format has positively affected the engagement and motivation of employees.

H2: Kazakhstani companies were supportive to employees during the pandemic and implemented new HR instruments successfully.

2. Literature review

2.1 Employee motivation

An organization's success is determined on how well it manages its personnel. Each level of the organization is directly related to the quality, commitment, passion, talent, and competence of its employees. Therefore, well-managed people resources of an organization mean its integral part that promotes strong competitiveness and high performance. HRM has a direct impact on firm's success due to the fact that HR practices regulate the employee behaviors such as engagement, participation and motivation and if employees have these proper behavioral traits, it is more likely that organizational performance will be of high quality and customer service will improve, consequently improvement of these company's aspects will lead to the improvement of financial results (Armstrong, 2014).

Employee motivation has a vital role within the company for the reason that it controls the level of attitude and enthusiasm of individuals about accomplishing the organization's objectives. It can be supported by the fact that motivation is the main source which generates and maintains the behavior on the way to accomplishment of goals. Communication between management and workers is considered as one of the crucial tools of employee motivation. An effective feedback and recognition from management stimulate workers to conduct their work well and promote positive atmosphere at the workplace (Rajhans, 2012).

Motivation is generally viewed as a psychological strength that generates diverse approaches of goal-oriented actions and ideas. Those kinds of behaviors revolve on a person's own internal and external influences, which indicate the direction, persistence, and amplitude of human activity directed toward a certain objective (Kanfer, Frese & Johnson, 2017).

Regarding motivation in the working environment, it is considered as a force which encourages individuals' desire and choice to act in order to achieve success at work. Moreover, all the activities done by the employee and related to the work including their approach, direction, depth and running time are determined and supported by motivation. So, work motivation plays a crucial role in shaping the worker's productivity and performance (Baron, 1991).

Work motivation is divided into two key types: intrinsic and extrinsic. When a person behaves for his own personal interest, intrinsic motivation occurs. Extrinsic type of motivation can be induced by a wide range of external incentives such as increased salary, bonus, promotion and more whereas intrinsic motivation generates only inner happiness and excitement in employees as a result of their job outcomes. According to studies, employee's work engagement is more likely to reach its maximum when the performance is affected by intrinsic and extrinsic motivations simultaneously (Gagne & Deci, 2005).

2.2 Motivation and remote work

Existing scientific researches on the topic of motivation during remote work highlight that mass implementation of the Work from Home format for a major part of employees around the World during COVID-19 has led to the changes in employee motivation and engagement. It was proven by a wide range of empirical studies but with conflicting results regarding whether the remote work enhances or reduces motivation and productivity in comparison to offline format.

Many research participants have highlighted that the greater flexibility was revealed during the remote work as a result of time spent on commuting which was substituted by vital processes like sleep, physical activities or other personal pleasant activities connected to family and children. Consequently, raising a family became simpler during the online work format. These kinds of work-life elements positively influenced employee motivation and productivity (Dryselius & Pettersson, 2021).

On the other hand, other empirical work has revealed certain negative sides of remote work such as blurred boundaries between work and individual activities. For instance, in the home office a large number of people, instead of stopping working during poor health conditions, are more likely to keep working whilst another part of the workers continue answering emails and calls on the matter of work even after the end of the working day. Blurring of boundaries creates additional employee stress which decreases motivation and desire to work (Bloom, et al., 2015).

Procrastination, lack of communication and information, social isolation and external interruptions are considered as the main problems that employees experience during remote work. Hence, maintaining appropriate and good communication including giving feedback, recognition and rewards that add value to workers' positive outcomes are the most powerful instruments that boost motivation not only in offices but also during online working format by management of the company (Hedström & Gonzalez Munoz, 2021).

2.3 Kazakhstani companies during the pandemic

According to EY Kazakhstan's annual labor market review for 2020, as a result of the introduction of the state of emergency, 89% of Kazakhstani employers transferred employees to a remote mode of work, while only 19% already had policies for performing work in a remote format. Kazakhstani companies were faced with a wide range of difficulties during the transformation work format, such as maintaining documentation and correspondence, lack of office equipment, as well as the needs in methods of controlling the process of work in new conditions. However, it was observed by EY Kazakhstan that companies that operated in 2020 in Kazakhstan have adapted to the economic situation under the pandemic and, despite the volatility of the market, they are taking measures to increase staff motivation through financial and non-financial incentives, as well as through new ways of maintaining communications and tracking the physical and emotional state of employees. Supporting team spirit and effective communication within the team is one of the most important factors in employee motivation during remote work. The use of online tools and platforms helps to organize virtual corporate meetings, as well as meetings of a freer format as team building events. For instance, EY Kazakhstan practices regular meetings in the format of "coffee with a partner" to give employees the opportunity to feel part of the team.

Measures taken by companies in a crisis situation according to EY Kazakhstan annual labor market overview for 2020:

- Employee surveys to identify their emotional state;
- Setting a quota for office visits;
- Providing employees with sanitary supplies;
- Daily monitoring of the health status of employees;
- New provisions for security in the office and for remote operation.

Financial assistance provided within Kazakhstani companies (EY Kazakhstan, 2020):

- Additional financial assistance in the form of one-time bonuses;
- Payment of telephony and Internet to employees at remote work;
- Providing medicines and treatment to infected workers in need;
- Provision of food baskets.

3. Methodology

In order to test hypotheses and find an answer to the research question of this project a mixed method was used in the study, with a combination of elements of qualitative and quantitative research.

The quantitative part of the study included a convenience sampling survey that was conducted to find out how the pandemic has affected the work environment. A survey was conducted among Kazakhstani employees, who were directly faced with the remote working format. The questionnaire was conducted with the help of Google Forms. Averagely, it took 6 minutes to respond to all questions, the research team tried to make all questions simple and accessible to answer. The survey included 150 respondents from different working areas: consulting services, manufacturing, aviation, construction, IT

companies, service maintenance, education and others. It was spread through social media channels, including Instagram, LinkedIn, Telegram, and WhatsApp. The questionnaire was anonymous. The survey consisted of 14 questions, 9 multiple choice questions, 3 open questions, and 2 rating scale-based questions (1-10; 1-5).

The qualitative part of the study included semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted through the Zoom platform with 5 representatives of HR departments from different companies. Each interview lasted an average of 30-45 minutes, included both open and closed questions, and all of them were recorded with the consent of all participants. Initially, we explained to respondents the topic of our research and asked them to introduce themselves. Then, the representatives of the companies told about the transition to the remote format, the difficulties they faced and how they worked with the motivation of employees, whether the motivation of employees in their companies has fallen or increased, and the HRM processes that have been changed.

The companies were selected from the list of the most attractive employers in Kazakhstan and include: Air Astana, ANCOR Central Asia, Ernst & Young, Aviata.kz and Corporate University of Samruk Kazyna.

While doing an internship at some of these companies, we managed to contact the HR departments and send invitations to participate in the study by email. We contacted other participants via LinkedIn.

4. Research results and findings

4.1 The influence of the remote work format on the motivation of employees (survey results)

Considering the analytical indicators of the study, 86 women and 64 men took part in the survey (Figure 1, Appendix A).

To understand the age of respondents, it is necessary to provide a socio-demographic question, which was divided into 5 widely used age groups: from 20-30, 30-40, 40-50, 50-60 and over 60. The majority of them were in the age group between 20 and 30 years old (82 respondents / 54,7%) (Figure 2, Appendix A).

The majority of the respondents are working in the following industries: consulting services (marketing, finance, law, HR), manufacturing / oil & gas, service maintenance (customer services), and education. A smaller number of respondents were representatives of other areas: IT, Construction companies, logistics companies, and HoReCa. In addition, representatives of the entire “Big 4” companies participated in the survey (Figure 3, Appendix A).

The company type of the respondents shows that they come from three sectors: international companies (22%), Quasi-State sector companies (28%) and private companies (50%) (Figure 4, Appendix A).

Due to the global pandemic, a large number of companies in Kazakhstan have switched to WFH format. Based on the results of the survey, 52% of the respondents had a combined format of work, when employees worked distantly, but sometimes they were allowed to come to workplaces. Also, 40% of respondents had a completely remote work format without an opportunity of visiting the office and 8% did not have any changes in work format and kept maintaining their job duties from the official workplaces (Figure 5, Appendix A).

The question based on the rating scale (0 - 10) proves that the majority of employees of various companies positively assessed the remote work format with the average rating is 7.08/10 (Figure 6, Appendix A).

Respondents were asked to rate their transition to remote work on a five-point scale, with 0 being difficult and 5 being easy. Overall results showed that most of the employees easily coped with the transition, 65 people rated this transition as 5/5 (Figure 7, Appendix A).

Despite the positive answers, many employees encountered problems during the remote format of work. The most common of them are blurring the boundaries of the working day, poor technical equipment, lack of direct communication with colleagues, distractions at home, low motivation and self-discipline. According to obtained results, 84 employees (56%) believe that the blurring of the boundaries of the working day is the most significant problem (Figure 8, Appendix A). Additionally, arranged

answers to open question state some positive aspects of this particular type of work, such as saving time and money on the commuting, extra time spent with relatives, freedom and flexibility.

Since the respondents were from different organizations, not all of them agreed that their employers made additional measures to support staff members. Slightly less than a half of respondents state that the company's management responded to requests and problems of employees, 38,7% claim that the employer has made just a few measures to maintain a convenient working environment and 21,3% answered that their companies were not supportive during remote work (Figure 9, Appendix A). Companies have taken drastic measures to make telecommuting easy for their employees. Some companies fully equipped employees technically, giving them computers and covering the Internet at the expense of the company. Almost all companies have used ZOOM or Microsoft Teams to provide communication and daily briefings. Several companies delivered special furniture (chairs and armchairs) to employees.

Based on employee preferences, about 10% are ready to completely switch to a remote format, 61% want to stick to a combined format, and only 29% want to return to the office and work with a standard schedule (Figure 10, Appendix A).

During the distance work employees experience a wide range of challenges including declined motivation, engagement and productivity. Among the respondents who worked remotely during the pandemic, 40% of them faced a problem with motivation, and the remaining part of the respondents believe that they did not have any problems with motivation (Figure 11, Appendix A).

The last question considered the individual suggestions of the respondents regarding the measures that could increase motivation during the remote work. Respondents proposed the following recommendations: introduction of a hybrid work format, organizing online corporate events, online lunches/coffee breaks with colleagues from their region and other countries, attracting a corporate psychologist, training, supplying employees with office equipment and high-quality machines (laptops), introducing online competitions/quizzes and changing the KPIs.

4.2 Transformations in HR processes of motivation and employee engagement (interview results)

Air Astana

Furkat Azimov, Senior Manager of the Employee Experience division in “Air Astana” shared that aviation is one of the few areas that has been greatly affected by the pandemic. 99% of flights were suspended, which is why all the activities of the production personnel servicing the flights were completely stopped. Previously, the company had already used methods of online testing and staff training, for example, before the pandemic, the IT department often worked remotely. Therefore, during the pandemic, one of the options was online training of production personnel. The transition was smooth thanks to the already established online processes and a good anti-crisis strategy, which was developed at the first emergency meeting. Due to this fact, the company quickly justified all its losses of 2020 in 2021 without staff reduction. In the field of compensation and benefits, the company has kept the full salary. Provided paid labor leave for 28 days for administrative staff and 60 days for staff that are engaged in servicing flights. If some of them did not have a year working in the company, they were allocated up to 25 days of labor leave as an advance or to go to the paid downtime. The package of benefits for employees has not changed.

Furkat Azimov also noticed an increase in communications between the CEO and the staff of the company. The CEO of Air Astana Peter Foster has started sending monthly emails to employees with plans for the next month, with current indicators, successes and failures. Contacts between line managers and their departments have also expanded. Each department met online at the beginning of the working day, discussed plans and tasks, and evaluated the results of the work done. And then everyone did their job. Pulse surveys were used to track the well-being of employees at remote work, which were subsequently transmitted to the heads of departments. It is emphasized that the work was suspended for a short period. A few months later, Air Astana started operating cargo and repatriation flights again and the staff for servicing flights was constantly mixed.

As a large company with a staff of 5,500 people, Air Astana has constantly improved its HR strategy, so there have been no noticeable transformations during the pandemic period.

ANCOR Central Asia

ANCOR - the leading staffing company in Central Asia that provides services in the field of recruiting, outsourcing and consulting. An interview was conducted with Diyara Omarova, Team Leader, Head of Nur-Sultan Branch in ANCOR. She shared that the recruitment process under COVID-19 pandemic has changed a lot. The fact is that the main task of the recruiter is to find a suitable specialist for the company with the necessary skills and attract him. During the pandemic, people were afraid of losing their jobs, afraid of changes and did not know what to expect from the future. Not many people were interested in changing the company, because when working remotely it is very difficult to understand the corporate culture and values of the company. It is difficult to understand what place you occupy in a new team. The demand for the services of recruitment agencies has fallen in terms of recruitment, but at the same time the demand for consulting and outsourcing services has increased. For this reason, in order not to put pressure on employees and not to reduce their motivation, ANCOR lowered the requirements for key performance indicators so that employee performance results, as well as the bonus part of wages, would not fall significantly.

In general, the transition to a remote format according to Diyara Omarova has helped to explore new online platforms for holding meetings with clients from different cities and countries. The company's service sector has greatly expanded geographically. Thanks to this experience, new horizons of development have opened up in recruitment.

At ANCOR Central Asia, the HR department was very concerned about employee engagement and motivation. If one of the employees was infected with a virus, they were sent baskets of fruits and vitamins. To maintain communications, film watching days were held online, games were played, and a new "thematic" reporting format was introduced in the form of presentations.

The company realized how important it is for employees to feel care from the employer, and therefore the approach to employee adaptation has been transformed. Each new employee was given a welcome box with a note "Welcome to the family". The peculiarity was that the company realized how important family is for its employees. Every September 1, employees who have children were given a day off. The CEO of ANCOR Central Asia sent handwritten thanks letters to the parents of the employees. Thus, the company united as one big family, where common values, goals, caring for each other and attachment to the company served as motivation and involvement.

Ernst & Young

One of the “Big Four” audit companies represented by Aida Aidynova, a junior HR specialist at EY, shared with us how the transition in a large international company went, according to her opinion. During the pandemic, the company lost a huge number of customers. Many of them are large companies that themselves experienced a crisis at the time of the lockdown, and no longer needed consulting services. However, Ernst & Young provided support and advice in crisis management services and labor legislation in the field of salary planning, layoffs, and downtime in other companies. Before the pandemic, the company organized annual team building in nature, issued corporate discounts from the company's partners and organized internal events in honor of the public holidays. However, during the pandemic, all these processes were suspended. When the entire staff was working remotely, there was a tendency for productivity growth among employees. According to the results of an internal survey in EY, it became clear that this was caused by the fact that the company's office is arranged in the style of open space, which is the reason for some distractions. Employees whose projects are closed on remote work quickly and efficiently were awarded as a commendation for motivation.

In order to maintain team spirit, the company organized joint coffee breaks at online conferences. As the restrictions were eased, according to the recommendations of the Chief Sanitary Doctor of the Republic of Kazakhstan, a limited number of people were allowed to be sent to work in the office. If desired, they could sign up and come to the office through a check at the reception. Thus, people were

given a choice: if you want to do work from home, then do it effectively, if you feel uncomfortable at home or think that your productivity has dropped a little, you can come to the open space in the office and do your job. Meetings were held on a monthly basis in order to listen to the opinion of employees on what should be added by the management in order to improve remote work, increase productivity and overall organization's performance. The hybrid format of work began to be welcomed even after leaving the lockdown. Outdoor activities, team building and business trips returned as far as possible.

Aviata.kz (Chocofamily holding)

One of the largest Internet companies in Kazakhstan Aviata.kz which is part of the Chocofamily holding also shared its transformations with the research group, the head of the HR department Dina Baimukhanova explain how the processes of employee motivation in IT companies have changed.

Aviata.kz also used a wide range of the methods of motivation and encouragement already mentioned above. The HR department organized a joint viewing of films and themed games in an online format for the whole team. Certificates for massage were issued to the customer support staff. Each employee was provided with equipment, necessary furniture and office supplies to work from home. Through the Trello platform, any department could describe the actions taken and the next steps, closed and planned projects. This was done so that everyone could see that each member of the team is making efforts to achieve common goals. The planned projects are being implemented and launched, and nothing stands still. All this is part of the corporate culture and is very important for a large company, especially a holding company as a whole.

The possibilities of the open world of the global labor market have shown that today it is possible to use non-standard methods. Therefore, the company stopped using clear rules and established a floating lunch and break schedule. The methods of the new management allowed IT employees to independently set a convenient time to complete tasks on time. It has become possible to invite foreign specialists to work, where time zones have ceased to matter. The only important point was to monitor the timing of implementation, testing and launch. The management of the company has shown that they value the self-

discipline of employees, does not limit them and gives them the opportunity to allocate their own areas of responsibility for themselves and their tasks.

At Aviafests and quarterly conducted Objectives and Key Results (OKR) meetings, each employee can present the results of the work done. By the end of the meetings, it was always highlighted that the whole work that was done was made not by one person, but the whole team participated in the project and everyone has contributed to the work. That is why team spirit in the company and corporate culture are considered as the most important motivators.

Corporate University of Samruk-Kazyna (CUSK)

CUSK is a consulting services center, engaged in the development and implementation of all HR processes within the Samruk-Kazyna Group of companies.

The most important difficulty in the transition to the remote format, according to Zhanar Baizhumanova, Managing Director for Business Support, was the transfer of the traditional paper format of documentation to a digital format. Many employees lacked the knowledge and skills to work in new online programs, many experienced fear and uncertainty. For this reason, the company has developed and sent out a psychological survey among employees about how managers can help in a time of remote work. The data allowed the company to build a plan that helped later manage employee engagement. Since then, special training has been conducted for managers to identify and deal with stress and demotivation among employees. The work was completely digitized, meetings were held on Skype For Business and Microsoft Teams, offline marker boards were transferred to boards in the Trello cloud program, and a guide on using these programs was also sent to employees. Before the pandemic, meetings with management were held once a quarter, subsequently it became clear that these meetings on remote work need to be held weekly. Equipment was also provided and employees could take everything they needed from the office to work from home. Some employees who carry out transactions were even given even 2 monitors to work with.

The processes of adaptation of new employees have also changed, so special training courses were provided for the heads of each department. Virtual tours of the office were conducted for new employees so that people would understand that they have a physical place of work to return to, after the restrictions would be lifted. Like most other companies, the Corporate University used chatbots so that employees could book the time at which they could come to the office and work. The company realized that simple things in the form of caring for employees keep them engaged and motivated.

5. Discussions and recommendations

According to the results of the study, it became clear that following World trends, large companies improved and constantly monitored all processes of their HR strategy even before the pandemic crisis. For medium and small businesses, the crisis has become a real revolution in the policy of employee motivation and engagement. Initially, in almost all companies, employees were scared of changes, then they were inspired by the appearance of a large amount of free time, saving on unnecessary costs, and increasing productivity from home. People experienced mixed feelings. However, after a period of getting used to the new working environment, stress came caused by the following factors, for instance, it seemed to the people that they were working around the clock, because the boundaries were erased. A work call could come outside of working hours, due to the fact that everyone was at home and had an opportunity to fulfill an assignment or a small request. The HR manager noticed these changes and constant correlations in the increase and decrease in work efficiency, therefore, employees began to return to the office as it became possible. Many people believe that a hybrid format of work in the modern world is the best option. In the labor market, there is no longer a committed opinion that a subordinate should stay in the office late, rework or not finish something.

If we take into account all companies and all economic spheres in Kazakhstan, the crucial transformations of HR processes have not happened everywhere yet. It means that most companies still have a free space to work on enhancing their processes. The world is changing and borders are spreading. Now it is very important that both the employee and the employer are interested in meeting each other's

needs. The employer wants to achieve success and profit in achieving their goals, employees want to be interested in this and know that they benefit and are in the value of the whole mechanism. That is why the values of the company and its corporate culture are so important nowadays. Hiring people who do not share these values, or the inability of the employer to convey these values, will lead to demotivation and dismissal, and dismissals lead to turnover. The management should also keep in mind the fact that highly motivated personnel are the driving force of any company which strives to achieve its corporate goals. Hence, HR managers must sustain regular communications, be open to workers' opinions and requests and constantly improve personnel management approach.

6. Problems and Limitations

The research team also intended to interview representatives from companies from the construction, banking, FMCG and HoReCa sectors. But we faced some problems from the external side, like assigning a convenient time for everyone outside of working hours or getting permission from the board of directors of these companies to disclose confidential information.

Another limitation was the small amount of publicly available information about transformations in HR policies in the companies. Available information about Kazakhstani companies could be taken only from interviews and reports from representatives. Therefore, the search for data in open access took a lot of time.

Conclusion

This research aimed to analyze how the pandemic has affected the motivation and engagement of employees. Likewise, it was important to determine how Kazakhstani companies supported their employees during the transition to WFH. In order to adapt to the difficulties during the pandemic, the management of various companies developed measures to optimize costs and retain employees and motivate them. Overall, the pandemic has influenced HR practices in a variety of ways. Before the

pandemic, companies that had all HR processes in place experienced fewer difficulties. Being adaptable was a key aspect of surviving during the pandemic.

Based on the survey, many employers have tried to make the remote format effective for their employees. Revision of KPI, equipment of working technicians (computers, laptops, furniture). The main mechanism for maintaining communication was the ZOOM and Microsoft Team platforms. In general, the remote format is well appreciated by employees. Among the respondents, 64% of employees confirmed that they are ready to combine remote and regular work formats on an ongoing basis, arguing that during the remote format it is easier to optimize their costs and do not need to waste time on commuting.

Interviews with representatives of various companies revealed in detail the picture of how companies dealt with sudden difficulties due to the pandemic. A lot of companies were focused on keeping employees motivated. In addition, a great number of them supported their employees medically. Successful steps have also been taken to preserve the corporate culture. In order for colleagues to have a connection, the company's management organized meetings of an entertaining nature, where employees could take a break from work and discuss day-to-day topics, laugh together, and thereby have a good time at a distance. Taking care of your own employees is also support for motivation on the part of the company's management. Fruit boxes and personal letters from the CEOs of companies encouraged employees not to lose their corporate spirit during difficult times.

This study consisted of the following hypotheses: The remote work format has positively affected the engagement and motivation of employees; Kazakhstani companies were supportive to employees during the pandemic and implemented new HR instruments successfully. Based on the comments of the respondents, the remote format had a positive impact on the involvement and motivation of employees. Also, the management of the company supported the employees, proving that employees are the main resource of the company. Therefore, many companies were able to adapt during the pandemic, rebuild their HR processes and not leave the Kazakhstani market.

Despite the fact that the pandemic has significantly affected the motivation and engagement of employees, the remote format has facilitated this transition and brought its positive aspects. Therefore, the hypothesis that the remote format had a positive effect on the motivation and involvement of employees is correct. Based on the results of the survey and interviews, about 80% of companies from different areas supported their employees during the remote format, therefore, the second hypothesis is also confirmed.

Bibliography

Armstrong, M. (2014). *Armstrong's Handbook of Human Resource Management Practice* (13th ed.).

Kogan Page.

Baron, R. A. (1991). *Motivation in work settings: Reflections on the core of organizational research. Motivation and Emotion, 15(1), 1–8.*

Bloom, N., Liang, J., Roberts, J., & Ying, Z. J. (2015). *Does working from home work? Evidence from a Chinese experiment. The Quarterly Journal of Economics, 130(1), 165-218.*

Dryselius, A., & Pettersson, J. (2021). *Motivation in the Remote Workplace: Understanding the Threats and Opportunities to Motivation During Enforced Remote Work (Dissertation).*

Ernst & Young Kazakhstan. *How COVID-19 changed the labor market in Kazakhstan. Labor market overview - 2020.* Retrieved from: https://www.ey.com/ru_kz/workforce/how-covid-19-changed-the-labor-market-in-kazakhstan

Gagné, M., & Deci, E. (2005). *Self-Determination Theory and Work Motivation. Journal of Organizational Behavior. 26. 331 - 362.*

Hedström, P., & Gonzalez Munoz, M. (2021). *Remote Work's Effect on Motivation : A study of how remote work during the covid-19 pandemic has affected employee motivation (Dissertation).*

Kanfer, R., Frese, M., & Johnson, R. E. (2017). Motivation related to work: A century of progress. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 102(3), 338–355.

KazInform (2022) Epidemiological situation of coronavirus at 23:59 on December 31, 2021 in Kazakhstan. Retrieved from: https://www.coronavirus2020.kz/ru/ob-epidemiologicheskoy-situacii-po-koronavirusu-na-23-59-chas-31-dekabrya-2021-g-v-kazahstane_a3880701

Mohan B.S. & Nambiar V. (2020) COVID-19: An Insights into SARS-CoV-2 Pandemic Originated at Wuhan City in Hubei Province of China. *J Infect Dis Epidemiol* 6:146. doi.org/10.23937/2474-3658/1510146 Retrieved from: <https://clinmedjournals.org/articles/jide/journal-of-infectious-diseases-and-epidemiology-jide-6-146.php?jid=jide>

Rajhans, K. (2012). *Effective Organizational Communication: a Key to Employee Motivation and Performance*. Interscience Management Review (IMR), 2 (2), 81-85.

Appendices

Appendix A

Figure 1: The quantity of respondents

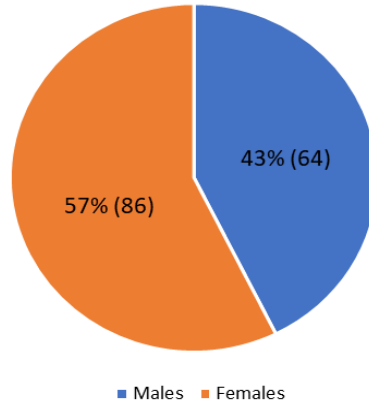


Figure 2: Age groups

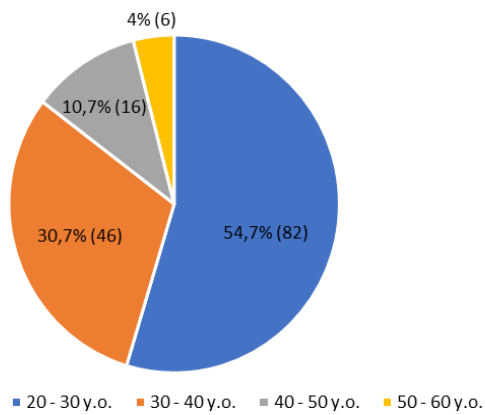


Figure 3: Core Activities of respondents

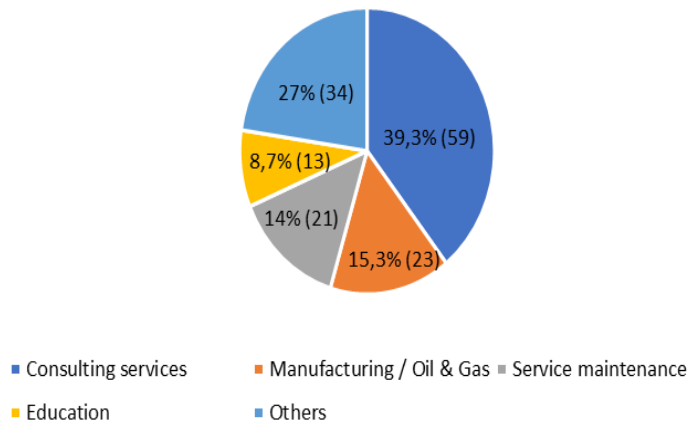


Figure 4: Type of the company

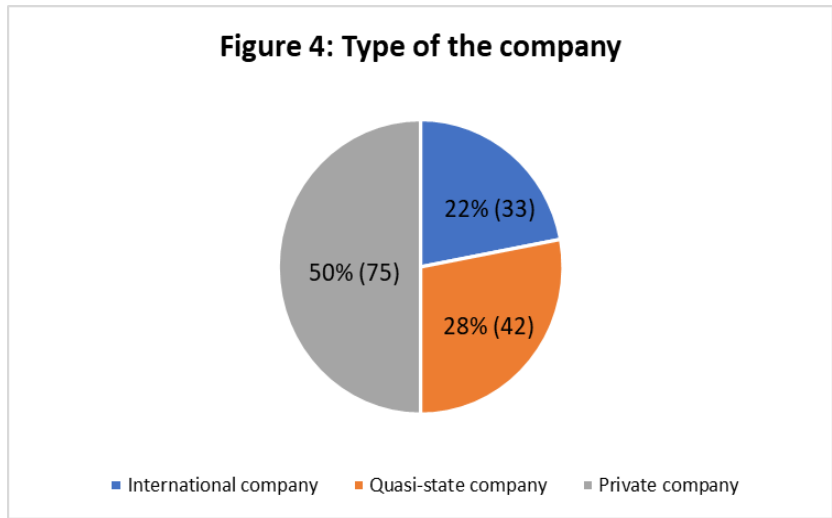


Figure 5: Working Formats

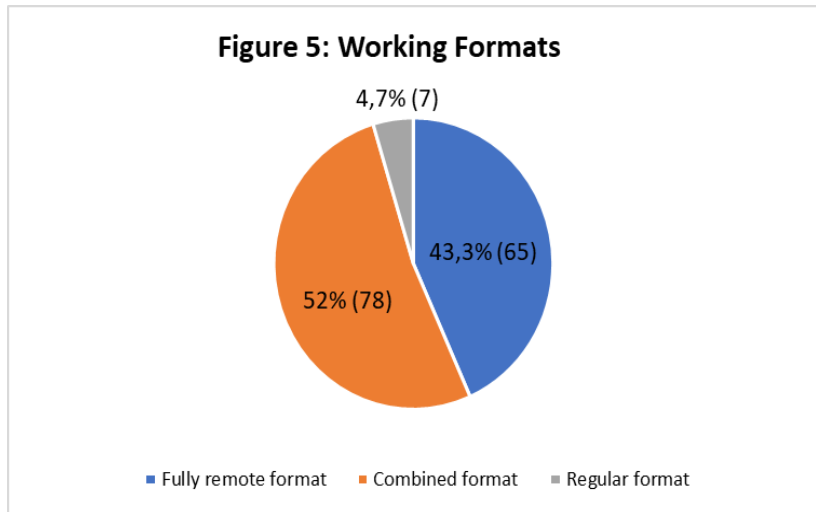


Figure 6: Evaluation of the remote format (0-sad, 10 - everything suits)

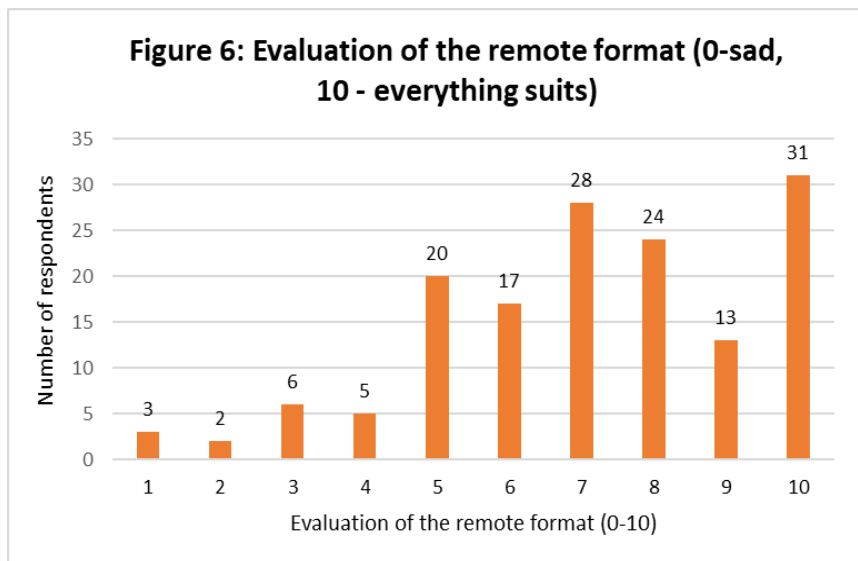


Figure 7: How the employees were treated during the transition to a remote format (0-hard, 5 easy)

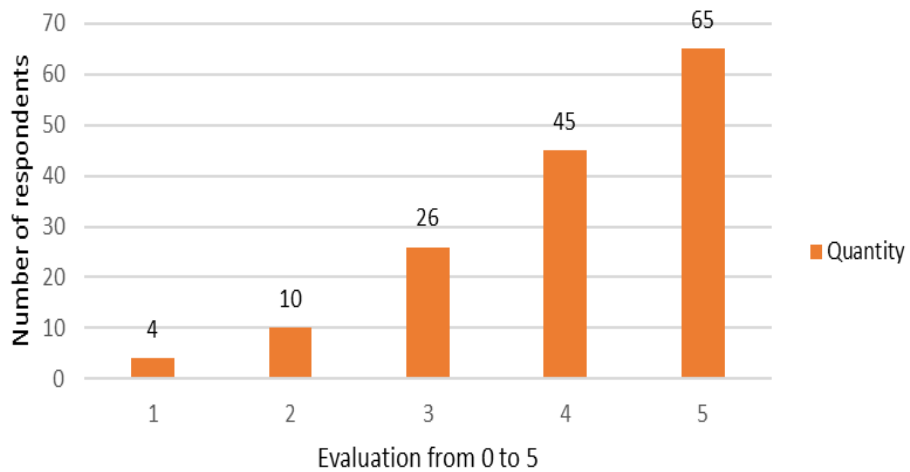


Figure 8: Problems during the remote working format

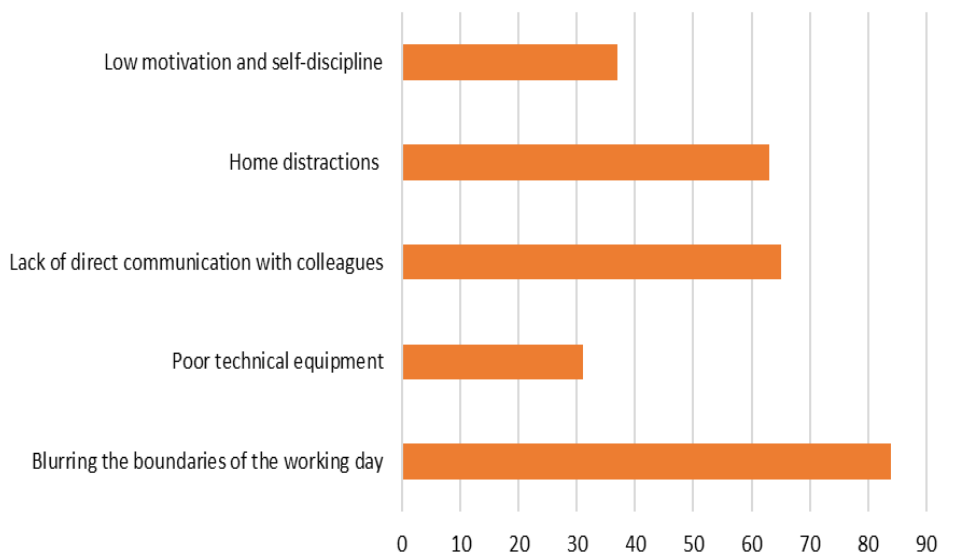
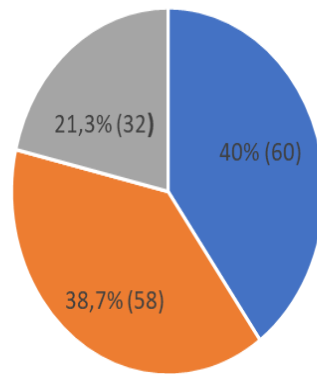
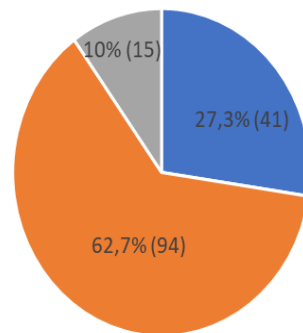


Figure 9: Were measures taken to improve the efficiency of employees in your company during the remote format?



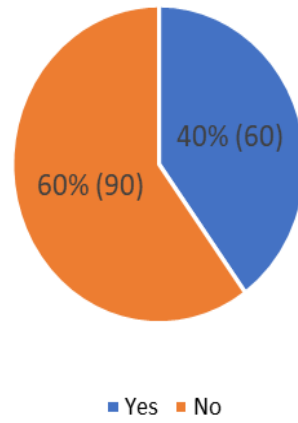
- Yes, the company's management did everything to make the remote format as productive as possible.
- Yes, the company's management has taken a number of steps to ensure the convenience of the workplace
- There were no measures

Figure 10: Personal preferences about working format



- Work in an office with standard
- Combined work (50% - remotely, 50% - visiting the office)
- Work completely remotely (WFH)

Figure 11: Have you experienced motivation problems while working remotely?



Appendix B

Survey Questions

1. What's your gender?
 - Male
 - Female
2. Indicate your age:
 - 20 - 30 years old
 - 30 - 40 years old
 - 40 - 50 years old
 - 50 - 60 years old
 - 60 +
3. Activities of the company in which you work:
 - Production / Mining
 - Consulting services (marketing, finance, law, HR)
 - Restaurant business and hotel business
 - Customer service
 - Education
 - Other
4. Type of company you work for:
 - International company
 - Quasi-state company
 - Private company (LLP, IP)
5. Did you switch to a remote work format during the global pandemic?
 - Yes, I worked remotely most of the time
 - Yes, I had a combined work format
 - No, my field of activity did not fall under these restrictions.

- Other
6. How do you rate the remote work format?
- (0 - sad, 10 - everything suits me)
7. How was the transition to the remote format for you?
- (0 - difficult, the company was not ready for such drastic changes, 5 - easy, there were no problems with the transition to a remote format)
8. Problems that you encountered during the remote work format:
- Blurring the boundaries of the working day
 - Weak technical equipment in the workplace
 - Problems or lack of interaction with colleagues
 - Low motivation and self-discipline
 - There were no significant problems
 - Other
9. Positive aspects of the remote format:
-
10. Were measures taken to improve the efficiency of employees in your company during the remote format?
- Yes, the company's management did everything to make the remote format as productive as possible
 - Yes, the company's management has taken a number of steps to ensure the convenience of the workplace
 - Not
 - Other
11. If so, what kind of measures?
-

12. Do you prefer:

- Work in an office with a regular schedule
- Combined work (50% - remotely, 50% - visiting the office)
- Work completely remotely (from home)
- Other

13. Have you experienced motivation problems while working remotely?

-

14. What are your suggestions for increasing the motivation of employees during the remote format:

-