

M. Stelmachenko,

PhD Student of the Department of Management and Finance, Mariupol State University

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-1229-1670>

DOI: 10.32702/2306-6814.2024.8.157

IDENTIFICATION AND ANALYSIS OF REMOTE PROJECT TEAMS' DEMOTIVATION CAUSES

М. Є. Стельмаченко,

аспірант кафедри менеджменту та фінансів, Маріупольський Державний Університет

ІДЕНТИФІКАЦІЯ ТА АНАЛІЗ ПРИЧИН ДЕМОТИВАЦІЇ ВІДДАЛЕНИХ ПРОЄКТНИХ КОМАНД

The article outlines the structural approach to the identification and analysis of demotivational causes of remote distributed teams, that can be applied for the sake of remote project teams' efficiency improvement. As widely known, the appearance of the COVID-19 virus led to the amplification of transformational processes that focus on the transition to online work mode, which subsequently generated a set of business challenges. Regardless high adoption rate of online solutions focused on collaboration, wide usage of information technologies in modern organizations, and the relatively low entry threshold required for interaction with digital systems, standard approaches to the analysis of personnel demotivation tend to underperform in remote environments and, therefore demand considerable enhancements. The modern process of transition from co-location mode into offline mode provides businesses with a set of benefits, such as cost reduction and automation of various operational activities, however, such metamorphosis requires a fundamental anticipation of problems that can occur as a result of this change — primarily, in terms of employee motivation and incentive, which are essential for the successful operations of a business of any kind. In that regard, the article analyzes the core causes of remote project teams' frustration, describes the standard motivational issues that human resources may face, specifies the core organizational problems that may negatively affect the initiative of distributed teams, and also proposes the framework that can help to identify causes and organizational aspects that can lead to further discouragement and subsequently negatively influence core business results. Hence, the described process provides organizations with an opportunity to assess the existing and potential discouragers that provoke a decline in the overall productivity of remote teams in addition to the suggestion of a straightforward action plan that is presumed to resolve the core demotivational drivers. Consequently, a regular and continuous implementation of the process described in the article can support the improvement of distributed personnel's contribution, which in its turn can help to increase the overall operational outcomes.

Стаття описує структурний підхід до ідентифікації та аналізу причин демотивації віддалених команд, що може бути використаний задля підвищення ефективності роботи проєктних команд, що працюють у віддаленому режимі. Як відомо, виникнення вірусу Covid-19 спонукало до підсилення трансформаційних процесів які фокусуються на переході до онлайн взаємодії за допомогою діджитальних та інформаційних систем, що у свою чергу створило цілу низку бізнес викликів. Виявлено, що не дивлячись на розвиненість інформаційних технологій, широку розповсюдженість доступу до мережі інтернет, а також низький поріг входу для взаємодії з подібними системами, стандартні підходи до визначення основних причин демотивації персоналу вимагають змін. Сучасний процес перебудови робочого процесу з оффлайн до онлайн режиму надає підприємствам можливість оптимізувати витрати та автоматизувати низку операційних активностей, одночасно з цим, подібні метамор-

фози вимагають фундаментального осмислення проблем які можуть виникнути в результаті подібного перетворення — в першу чергу у розрізі мотивації персоналу, що є одним з провідних базисів успішного функціонування організації. Таким чином, у статті проаналізовано основні групи демотиваторів людських ресурсів, описаний набір стандартних мотиваційних та стимуляційних проблем з якими стикаються віддалені працівники, визначені основні організаційні проблеми, що можуть негативно впливати та ініціативність розподілених команд, а також сформульовано та описано фреймворк на-правлений на ідентифікацію причин та організаційних аспектів, що в перспективі можуть призвести до втрати мотивації та таким чином негативно вплинути на основні бізнес-показники підприємства. Таким чином, описаний процес надає можливість розглянути наявні та потенційні подразники, що спонукають до зниженої проактивності персоналу що працює в режимі онлайн одночасно з визна-ченням подальшого плану дій, що буде направлено на розв'язання головних подразників. В подальшому, регулярне та злагоджене слідування процесу описаному в статті зможе сприяти покращенню роботи розподіленого персоналу, що в свою чергу зможе покращити операційні показники підприємств.

Key words: motivation, demotivation, remote work, distributed teams, analysis of teams, project management, organizational management, team coordination.

Ключові слова: мотивація, демотивація, віддалена робота, розподілені команди, аналіз команд, про-ектний менеджмент, менеджмент організацій, координація команд.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Given the dynamics of globalization forces, the role of personnel efficiency in modern economics is hard to overstate, especially in light of its significant impact on the ability to remain competitive and meet market needs. In recent years, organizational effectiveness has emerged as one of the primary focuses for a vast number of industries, especially due to its considerable effect on the overall ability to achieve the utmost output. Long-term industry trends reasonably confirm that enterprises always tend to achieve a peak level of workforce performance, that subsequently can be converted into higher revenue growth and greater returns on investments, although the recent paradigm shift with an emphasis on remote work made this process outstandingly compound, disregarding the primary field of the organization's focus or its head-count. Taking into account that the greater part of the market labour is better adapted for in-person cooperation it is rational to believe that not all businesses possess a fundamental comprehension and lasting prior expertise connected to the analysis of demotivation causes that affect remote employees, which potentially generates a negative threat for the companies' operations in case of switch into online workplace mode that was also observed during the pandemic. Therefore, the necessity of sustainable approaches that can encourage the efficient analysis of core discouragers of remote teams has naturally become one of the paramount topics for entrepreneurs, thereby the review of this problem from different perspectives and coming up with a specific approach that can assist with this risk mitigation and avoidance address the existing market needs.

ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS

In the current market climate, the aforementioned problem of distributed teams' demotivation and its further

analysis has started attracting more attention in both academic and professional environments. The topic was reviewed by such scholars as S. Beecham, S. Aharouay, S. Geister, U. Konradt, G. Hertel, L. Burroughes, C. Grant and others. However, the current knowledge base on this matter still needs to be improved due to its relatively small scale. Considering a rapidly growing number of diverse challenges that businesses are facing in the world of the post-COVID-19 economy, reasonable to assume that potentially we may start observing even more occasions of business transformations that require a full transition from the physical co-location way of interaction into the fully digital teams that could be present in various locations and time zones. As a result, such conceptual shifts might trigger new and unique obstacles that were not covered in the prior articles and research papers. For this reason, the additional review of the defined problem appears to be rational and demandable.

PRESENTATION OF THE MAIN RESEARCH MATERIAL

The process of organizational transition from a co-located environment to a remote one has always been connected with a wide array of workplace challenges. Primarily, those were caused by drastic changes in the way of interpersonal cooperation and collaboration, in addition to a significant impact on established processes that were serving the teams as a fundamental guideline for their daily efficiency. It was discovered that due to similar substantial changes, labour may tend to struggle with the fulfillment of the most basic responsibilities, which raises a major concern regarding the potential problem areas that businesses must anticipate and thoroughly monitor before the transformation phase.

As was reported, in the matter of core demoralizers that take place within the remote work process, the personnel typically outlines such issues as lack of resources,

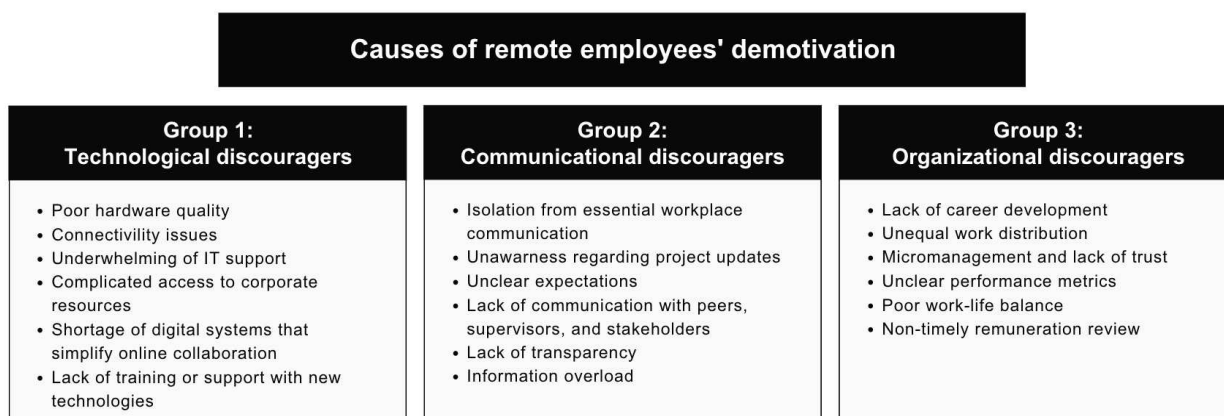


Figure 1. Causes of remote employee's demotivation

Source: formed based on [1].

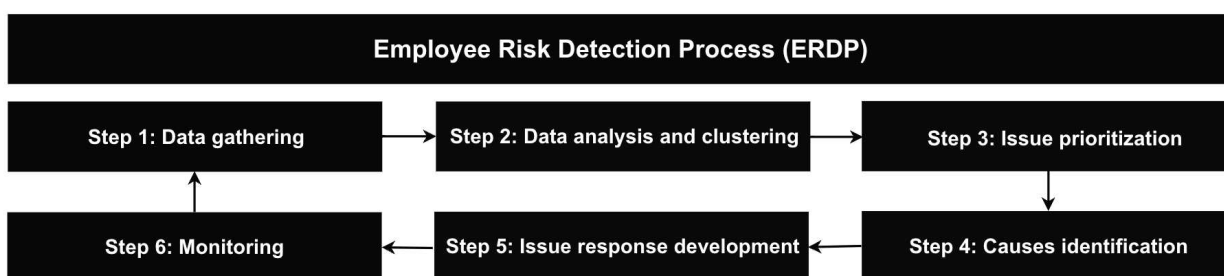


Figure 2: Employee Risk Detection Process (ERDP)

Source: generated by the author.

lack of discipline and focus at home, lack of formal and informal face-to-face discussions, lack of project-related communication, lack of IT-support, and especially the presence of strict security policies that made the access to online corporate resources much more complicated and even impossible in some certain occasions [1]. For the sake of better comprehension of probable issues that may arise, the described distribution of core concerns could be rationally clustered into the following problem groups that separately reflect various problem areas that may lead to employees' dissatisfaction and productivity decline:

— Technological discouragers — a set of software and hardware-related issues that can create technological blockers for the team members and lead to overall workplace frustration.

— Communicational discouragers — obstacles that arise due to the lack of interaction between the remote team members that lead to a lack of context comprehension, lack of involvement, and lack of participation.

— Environmental discouragers — issues that negatively impact the labour's perception of the current role, organization, their position in the company, thus they can prevent remote team members from reaching the utmost workplace potential.

As outlined in Figure 1, for a better understanding of causes that may lead to workforce resentment, each separate dissatisfaction group could be also assigned with a set of examples that provide a more holistic view of the possible issues. For instance, Group 1 (Technological discouragers) outlines the potential technological issues that may lead to further dissatisfaction. Group 2 (Communicational discouragers) focuses on the flaws within the communicational

aspect of the work, that can trigger interpersonal miscommunication and insufficient context. Consequently, Group 3 (Organizational discouragers) highlights the weak spots that exist in the organizational landscape of specific enterprises, which nonetheless can also provoke employee irritation and conduce additional underperformance.

All things considered, the aforesaid distribution of code demotivation factors raises a reasonable question — is there any approach for remote team motivation? In that connection, our following target is to review a set of practices that could assist the entrepreneurs with risk identification and assessment of potential problem areas that may emerge from the teams' transition to the remote workplaces, underline the essential motivational strategies, and provide the recommendations on the development of solid remote work culture with a strong emphasis on the employee's efficiency.

The identification of core reasons that could lead to demotivation of the teams has never been a minor task to complete. The research of Bedrii and Semko has thoroughly stressed the importance of detailed appraisal of risks related to human resources, due to its potentially weighty impact on the overall operational output [2]. To address the aforementioned task with an emphasis on the detection of risks that lead to remote employees' demotivation, we can refer to the Employee Risk Detection Process (ERDP), the primary aim of which is to provide enterprises with a comprehensive tool that can help business to apprehend their risks and develop certain response strategies. In line with the goal, the Employee Risk Detection Process outlines the following procedure of risk identification and assessment that is described in Table 2.

The universality and possibility of broad implementation of this method in real circumstances is being achieved via a wide spectrum of steps performed, that help supervisors not only identify the potential demotivational forces, but also range them as regards to their severity, alongside with selection of response action plan which is tasked to prevent, mitigate, or avoid the entire discouragement item:

Step 1: Data gathering. The data-gathering process undertakes the accumulation of dissatisfaction-related information from various internal sources. That can be achieved with the help of the following techniques:

- 1-2-1 meetings with staff: as was proposed by Flinchum et al, this type of interaction greatly benefits both line workers and their supervisors due to its capability to set a confidential communication environment that encourages the exchange of information that might be not appropriate for the meetings of a different kind [3].

- Distribution and collection of companywide satisfaction surveys: bearing in mind the distributed nature of the remote teams, it is reasonable to take advantage of anonymous online satisfaction surveys, that provide businesses with a flexible source of structurally organized data focused on the received of team feedback.

- Measure of Employee Net Promoter Score (eNPS): eNPS evaluation helps enterprises to assess the overall workforce satisfaction and readiness to positively promote their current place of work or recommend it to their peers, which could be objectively measured on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 reflects complete dissatisfaction, while 10 stands for undivided content [4].

- Online reviews monitoring: considering the widespread usage of online platforms like Glassdoor that facilitate the sharing of employees' feedback, it also makes sense to consider suchlike data on workplace culture criticism as valuable input for further internal analysis.

Step 2: Data analysis and clustering. Data analysis and clustering underline the interpretation of received data with a consequent grouping into similar categories that reflect comparable problem areas together with the detection of patterns and similarities between them. Based on the findings of Tsinakos and Balafoutis [5] it's been recommended to consider mind-mapping technique as an efficient clustering approach for visual representation of connected items. This study's findings demonstrate that the mind-mapping technique facilitates the transition from the time-consuming, disassociated, and disconnected treatment of separate problem areas towards the structured vision of the primary cause and adjacent effects. Thus, during the mind-mapping process, the individual is supposed to perform a holistic overview of all the feedback available, define the primary high-level categories that would reflect major problem areas, and populate each group with a distinct set of unique and unrepeatable problems. In that connection, the described way of data structuring via mind-mapping techniques coordinates the attention towards the essential action items and minimizes the loss of productive time by eliminating redundant duplicates of team performance

discouragers that may require allocation of resources for future analysis and consideration.

Step 3: Issue prioritization. Throughout the execution of the issue prioritization process, the organizations are recommended to perform an assessment and priority-setting activities regarding every single problem group identified during the data clustering phase, starting with the most critical ones on the top of the scale, followed by less impactful items. This can be achieved via issue prioritization frameworks that could be defined as a beneficial process implemented in the interest of quantitative issue analysis, that objectively differentiates the problem areas that require immediate attention and improvement from the secondary action items the resolution of which might be delayed due to their less critical impact on the team. The list of issues can be prioritized using the straightforward approach, that prescribes the following categorization [6]:

First priority: issues that have a high impact on the team motivation and have high importance for the team members, hence should be addressed at the early stages of identification.

Second priority: items with a significant negative impact, however with low importance for the human resources.

Third priority: issues that deal the minor impact in terms of demotivation, however, tend to be important for the workforce.

No-priority: issues that have a low negative impact on the team motivation and reflect insufficient importance for the team members, therefore should be ignored due to lack of value that could be brought by potential resolution.

Step 4: Causes identification. The causes identification process reflects root-cause analysis and assessment apropos each demotivational group identified in the previous steps, with a strong intent on pinpointing the core reason that leads to further frustration and irritation of the workforce. In the example of online teams, the identification of demotivational grounds that lead to the unsatisfaction of human resources could be performed using the "5 Whys technique". 5 Why approach targets the execution of root-cause analysis in the interest of main underlying root determination by asking the question "Why?" 5 consecutive times [7]. As a result, every single answer obtained during this process generates a foundation for all the corresponding ones by creating a vital context that could lead to the declaration of the primary problem [7].

Step 5: Issue response development. Issue response development requires the formulation and design of an action plan that can assist in mitigation or avoidance of the risks that exist within the organization and negatively affect the existing employees. This process can be considered an indispensable pre-requisite to the resolution of personnel demotivation, due to its ability not only to spotlight the available problems but also to elicitate specific action items that would address the existing issues. In support of an efficient issue response development process, it is highly recommended to perform cross-company brainstorming sessions with the involvement of both non-managerial employees and various

levels of management. Such an arrangement has the capability of benefiting the entire organization as a whole, due to the formation of a so-called virtual communication platform, where employees can align on their expectations, needs, wants, demands, and ultimately reach a consensus on the problem-solving approach that would be resolving the primary discourager.

Step 6: Monitoring. This process stipulates the execution of an observation plan with an emphasis on monitoring activities that facilitate the evaluation of the current stance of the team with a connection to its satisfaction, motivation, and proactiveness. In the present business landscape, team monitoring has become one of the paramount activities that caught the attention of entrepreneurs, due to its capacity to advance the comprehension of actual workforce efficiency and performance [8]. Therefore, as a concluding step within the Employee Risk Detection Process (ERDP) it is highly recommended to perform a regular assessment of the present stance of the teams using the evaluation approaches described in the Data Gathering process section. Based on this, it is necessary to underline that such a direct connection between the Monitoring and Data gathering phases, makes EDRP a lightweight and straightforward system with a repeatable workflow, that allows enterprises to perform a regular self-evaluation, assessment, and monitoring of workplace discouragers that can negatively impact the team performance for the sake of future improvements and resolution of issues that harm the overall organizational output.

CONCLUSION

As outlined in this article, the problem of workplace dissatisfaction remains actual and relevant, especially in the context of remote distributed teams due to the potential risk of insufficient communication, involvement, and other issues related to technological and organizational aspects of remote work. In light of the challenges that are tightly connected to remote workplace environments, it is imperative for organizations to perform a frequent analysis of remote employees' motivation levels and potential discouragements that could negatively affect their ability to create value and remain efficient. In that regard, the Employee Risk Detection Process (ERDP) illustrated within this paper aspires to provide businesses with a simple and direct approach that is capable of serving their needs in terms of organization issues identification, that can lead to demotivation of human resources, that subsequently may be one of the cornerstones of value creation decline.

Література:

1. Habaibeh, A.A., Watkins, M., Waried, K. and Javareshk, M.B. (2021), "Challenges and opportunities of remotely working from home during Covid-19 pandemic", *Global Transitions*, vol. 3, pp. 99—108.
2. Bedrii, D. and Semko, I. (2019), "Cognitive model for assessing the impact of personnel risks and conflicts in scientific projects", *Science and Education a New Dimension*, vol. 7, pp. 34—37.
3. Flinchum, J.R., Kreamer, L.M., Rogelberg, S.G. and Gooty, J. (2022), "One-on-one meetings between managers and direct reports: A new opportunity for meeting science", *Organizational Psychology Review*, vol. 13, pp. 478—505.
4. Yaneva, M. (2021), "Employee Satisfaction vs. Employee Engagement vs. Employee NPS", *European Journal of Economics and Business Studies*, vol. 4, pp. 221—227.
5. Tsinakos, A. A., & Balafoutis, T. (2009). "A Comparative Survey On Mind Mapping Tools", *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education*, vol. 10, pp. 55—67.
6. SafetyCulture (2024), "Prioritization Matrix: Everything You Should Know", available at: <https://safetyculture.com/topics/prioritization-matrix> (Accessed 9 Apr 2024).
7. Daskocil, R. and Lacko, B. (2019), "Root Cause Analysis in Post Project Phases as Application of Knowledge Management". *Sustainability*, [Online], vol. 11, available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11061667> (Accessed 9 Apr 2024).
8. Budianto, T., Susanto, E., Sitalaksmi, S. and Kismono, G. (2020), "Team Monitoring, Does it Matter for Team Performance? Moderating role of Team Monitoring on Team Psychological Safety and Team Learning", *Journal of Indonesian Economy and Business*, vol. 35, pp. 81—96.

References:

1. Habaibeh, A.A., Watkins, M., Waried, K. and Javareshk, M.B. (2021), "Challenges and opportunities of remotely working from home during Covid-19 pandemic", *Global Transitions*, vol. 3, pp. 99—108.
2. Bedrii, D. and Semko, I. (2019), "Cognitive model for assessing the impact of personnel risks and conflicts in scientific projects", *Science and Education a New Dimension*, vol. 7, pp. 34—37.
3. Flinchum, J.R., Kreamer, L.M., Rogelberg, S.G. and Gooty, J. (2022), "One-on-one meetings between managers and direct reports: A new opportunity for meeting science", *Organizational Psychology Review*, vol. 13, pp. 478—505.
4. Yaneva, M. (2021), "Employee Satisfaction vs. Employee Engagement vs. Employee NPS", *European Journal of Economics and Business Studies*, vol. 4, pp. 221—227.
5. Tsinakos, A. A., & Balafoutis, T. (2009). "A Comparative Survey On Mind Mapping Tools", *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education*, vol. 10, pp. 55—67.
6. SafetyCulture (2024), "Prioritization Matrix: Everything You Should Know", available at: <https://safetyculture.com/topics/prioritization-matrix> (Accessed 9 Apr 2024).
7. Daskocil, R. and Lacko, B. (2019), "Root Cause Analysis in Post Project Phases as Application of Knowledge Management". *Sustainability*, [Online], vol. 11, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11061667>
8. Budianto, T., Susanto, E., Sitalaksmi, S. and Kismono, G. (2020), "Team Monitoring, Does it Matter for Team Performance? Moderating role of Team Monitoring on Team Psychological Safety and Team Learning", *Journal of Indonesian Economy and Business*, vol. 35, pp. 81—96.

Стаття надійшла до редакції 10.04.2024 р.