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International Economics and Commerce

Covid-19 impact on teamwork and leadership in project management. A focus on non-profit organizations through the King Baudouin Foundation case.

L'impatto del Covid-19 sul teamwork e la leadership nel project management. Un focus sulle organizzazioni non-profit attraverso lo studio di caso della Fondazione King Baudouin.

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## **ABSTRACT**

La presente tesi magistrale è il risultato di un'analisi empirica e il suo obiettivo principale è quello di comprendere gli effetti del Covid-19 sulle dinamiche di leadership e di teamworking nel project management. Tali dinamiche, infatti, risultano spesso sottovalutate quando si tratta di raggiungere efficientemente degli obiettivi, tuttavia garantire un giusto stile e delle giuste competenze di leadership e favorire la comunicazione e la collaborazione tra i membri di un gruppo può aumentare notevolmente la performance di un team, portandolo ad alti livelli di efficienza ed efficacia. La pandemia da Covid-19 ha però avuto un forte impatto su queste dinamiche, obbligando i team e i leaders a lavorare da remoto, destrutturando così i consolidati processi di lavoro. Pertanto, il presente elaborato si focalizza sul comprendere quali siano stati gli effetti dell'ambiente pandemico e quali siano i modi in cui i team di progetto hanno contrastato tale crisi.

La ricerca si è inoltre focalizzata sul terzo settore, il quale per alcune sue peculiarità quali la presenza di volontari, la maggioranza delle entrate composte da donazioni e il perseguimento di una mission a sfondo sociale, si distingue nettamente dal settore for-profit. Un secondo scopo dell'elaborato è stato dunque quello di comprendere se alcune peculiarità delle non-profit hanno influenzato, o

addirittura facilitato, la risposta alla crisi da parte dei team di progetto. Per questo motivo, è stato condotto uno studio di caso su un'organizzazione non-profit.

L'elaborato è suddiviso in quattro capitoli. Il primo capitolo si focalizza sul fenomeno del teamwork, definendolo ed analizzando i criteri di efficacia dei gruppi di lavoro. Viene inoltre proposto e descritto il modello normativo di Hackman il quale evidenzia le classi di variabili necessarie alla costruzione di un team performante. Infine, vengono analizzate le peculiarità dei team virtuali, le loro principali limitazioni e i loro criteri di efficacia.

Il secondo capitolo si concentra invece sul fenomeno della leadership, analizzandone i diversi stili e indagandone l'efficacia in base al contesto. Inoltre, vengono descritte le competenze chiave che ogni leader di successo deve possedere. Infine, vi è un focus sui principali effetti della pandemia da Covid-19 sulla leadership.

Il terzo capitolo si focalizza sul terzo settore, delineando le principali caratteristiche dello stesso e illustrando come le pratiche di leadership, teamwork e project management vengono applicate dalle organizzazioni non-profit. Infine, anche qui vi è un focus sulle conseguenze della diffusione del Covid-19.

Il quarto capitolo presenta lo studio di caso della Fondazione King Baudouin, la più grande organizzazione non-profit del Belgio. Dopo aver presentato l'organizzazione oggetto di studio, vengono descritti la metodologia e i risultati di una ricerca condotta attraverso la somministrazione di un questionario

quantitativo e di sei interviste qualitative. Vengono infine illustrate le principali conclusioni del lavoro svolto.

## **INTRODUCTION**

This master thesis is the result of an empirical research and its main aim is understanding the impact that the recent Covid-19 pandemic had on leadership and teamwork processes in the practice of project management. The focus of the research is on the third sector, therefore a study case on an international non-profit organization has been conducted in order to prove empirically the theoretical findings.

I decided to study this subject for many reasons. First of all, leaders and teams' dynamics are often underestimated elements of success in project management and in organizations, therefore I wanted to highlight their importance showing how different approaches can lead to different results, and that there are some best practices that can be adopted in order to maximize the projects' outcomes.

Secondly, I was interested in understanding how the peculiar characteristics of the third sector affect the way people manage and work in teams. The third sector is in fact different from the private one, and I wanted to understand whether these differences also influence the organizational dynamics of the NPOs.

Finally, Covid-19 pandemic is a phenomenon that deeply and greatly affected some leadership and teamwork dynamics, obliging people to adapt to a new environment and to work with limited social interactions and a higher amount of stress and problems to deal with, conditioning in turn the outcome of projects.

Since there are not many studies on the topic yet, I wanted to contribute to the modest existing literature by bringing new and original findings.

To fulfil these objectives, I studied many textbooks and scientific articles related to the topics mentioned above and I carried out an empirical research on the main non-profit organization of Belgium, the King Baudouin Foundation, by administering a quantitative questionnaire and conducting six qualitative interviews.

The thesis is structured in four chapters. The first one analyses the main characteristics of teamwork and the effects that Covid-19 pandemic had on it. The second one highlights the main attributes and the different styles of leadership with a focus on the influence that SARS-COV-2 epidemic had on it. The third one defines the main features of the third sector, explaining also how it reacted to the recent Covid-19 crisis. The fourth one presents the methodology and the results of the empirical research that has been conducted on the King Baudouin Foundation showing which theoretical findings of the first three chapters have been experienced and applied by this huge international NPO.



# CHAPTER I

## TEAMWORK

### INTRODUCTION

Nowadays in many organizations and, above all, in project management, teams are the most common unit of work.

According to Wysocki (2012) a project can be defined as “*a sequence of unique, complex and connected activities that have one goal or purpose and that must be completed by a specific time, within budget, and according to specifications*”<sup>1</sup>.

Since projects are really complex to manage and their success is crucial for companies and organizations, today the discipline of project management has become fundamental.

Traditionally, project success has been measured using three criteria: cost, time and performance. Anyway, recent studies on project management show that almost two-thirds of projects fail and that 65% of projects’ failure is due to “people issues”<sup>2</sup>. This means that, in order to achieve the objectives of a project, another important variable should be taken into account: teamwork. In fact,

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<sup>1</sup> Karl A. Smith, *Teamwork and Project Management – Fourth Edition*, McGraw-Hill Education, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> R. E. Levasseur, *People Skills: Ensuring Project Success—A Change Management Perspective*, “Interfaces”, Vol. 40, No. 2, pp. 159-162, published by INFORMS, March-April 2010.

effective team implementation can have significant results on an organization's productivity and profitability. It is therefore known that the more a team is implemented in an effective way, the more people's motivation will increase, enhancing their effort and productivity<sup>3</sup>.

For all the reasons mentioned above, in order to succeed in project management, it is hence fundamental to understand how teams work and which factors increase teams' effectiveness.

Starting from this premise, the present chapter will analyse the phenomenon of teamwork, both trying to understand which variables can lead to project success and presenting a model of effectiveness designed by Hackman. Finally, in the last paragraph of this chapter, there will be a focus on the effects that Covid-19 pandemic had on teamwork by changing working teams into virtual ones, challenging team members to adapt to a new environment and to develop new ways to coordinate and to communicate with each other.

## **1.1 TEAMWORK: DEFINITION AND QUALITY INDICATORS**

*“A team can be defined as a social system of three or more people, which is embedded in an organization (context), whose members perceive themselves as*

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<sup>3</sup> M. A. Griffin, M. G. Patterson and M. A. West, *Job Satisfaction and Teamwork: The Role of Supervisor Support*, “Journal of Organizational Behavior”, Vol. 22, No. 5, pp. 537-550, August 2001.

*such and are perceived as members by others (identity), and who collaborate on a common task (teamwork)''<sup>4</sup>.*

Homans (1974) stated that human behaviour in teams can be conceptualized in activities, interactions and sentiments. Activities are actions of individuals that can be observed and measured in their quantity and in their correctness of execution. The term “interaction” refers to the degree of connectedness of the agents that are part of the same team. The term “sentiment” is instead connected to human emotions, to people’s motivations and attitudes towards the team.

In order to understand how teams work, it is firstly important to understand why agents are motivated to and decide to do something together, becoming a team and working on a common purpose.

We can consider agents as situated in a multi-agent and dynamic environment, possessing incomplete and incorrect beliefs, having changeable goals and actions, and being influenced by external circumstances. Furthermore, we have to assume that agents do not know their mutual beliefs and goals, which can differ and change over time. Those agents can pursue different individual goals and carry out different individual actions, but if they have a joint commitment and a joint

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<sup>4</sup> M. Hoegl and H. G. Gemuenden, *Teamwork Quality and the Success of Innovative Projects: A Theoretical Concept and Empirical Evidence*, “Organization Science”, Vol. 12, No. 4, pp. 435-449, July-August 2001.

intention, then they can work as a team<sup>5</sup>. We can say that a group of agents is jointly committed in achieving something when they have a mutual persistent goal. A joint intention is instead defined to be a joint commitment to the agents' having done a collective action, with the team acting in a joint mental state. When agents adopt joint commitments and intentions, then other forms of interactions are built and joint actions and activities are originated<sup>6</sup>.

Even if those characteristics are sufficient to build a team, many times they are not sufficient to build an effective team. As stated in the introduction, in fact, many projects fail and often these failures are attributable to wrong teamwork processes. Hoegl and Gemuenden (2001) studied Teamwork Quality (TWQ) and defined six facets of the collaborative team process that can be used as performance-relative measures of teams' internal interactions. These six facets are:

- *Communication*: which is a mean of exchange of information among team members. It can be analysed according to frequency and degree of formalization which are indicators describing the relationships among people. It is fundamental for a team in order to work well and it has to be sufficiently frequent, informal, direct and open.

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<sup>5</sup> P. R. Cohen and H. J. Levesque, *Teamwork*, "Noûs", Vol. 25, No. 4, pp. 487-512, September 1991.

<sup>6</sup> Ibidem.

- *Coordination*: which is the degree of common understanding regarding the interrelatedness and current status of individual contribution. Teams need to agree on a common work-down structure, in order to harmonize and synchronize the individual contributions of their members.
- *Balance of members contributions*: which means that every team member has to contribute with his knowledge in every single task carried out by the team. Team members' contributions have to be balanced with regards to their competences and specific knowledge to ensure teamwork quality.
- *Mutual support*: which for independent tasks is more productive than forms of competition among team members. It is important for people to be respected, assisted when needed and listened to in order to perform well, therefore mutual support is a fundamental indicator of teamwork quality.
- *Effort*: everyone has to put sufficient effort in the team activities in order to achieve its objectives. It is important for a team to clarify from the beginning which levels of effort are expected, to let everybody work accordingly and uniformly.
- *Cohesion*: which is the degree to which team members desire to remain on the team. It is fundamental to keep the team together and engage it in collaboration. The forces driving cohesion are the interpersonal attraction

of team members, the commitment to the task and the group pride-team spirit.

These performance-relative measures can be used to assess projects' success in terms of team performance and personal success of team members. Gemuenden (1990) states that "*team performance can be defined as the extent to which a team is able to meet established quality and cost and time objectives*" and it can be described in terms of effectiveness and efficiency. Furthermore, teams have also to work in a way that increases people's satisfaction and learning, which are characteristics that define the personal success of team members<sup>7</sup>.

Studies show that communication, coordination, balance of members' contributions, mutual support, effort and cohesion are all fundamental in order to provide teamwork quality, and since teamwork quality influences teamwork performance and personal success (which are indicators of projects' success), then all those factors above are fundamental to improve projects' success.

Also, fluidity is another team's characteristic that may influence the success of projects<sup>8</sup>. In fact, the composition of team members in teams may or might not change in the transition from one project to another. If a team remains unchanged

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<sup>7</sup> M. Hoegl and H. G. Gemuenden, *Teamwork Quality and the Success of Innovative Projects: A Theoretical Concept and Empirical Evidence*, "Organization Science", Vol. 12, No. 4, pp. 435-449, July-August 2001.

<sup>8</sup> C. Buengeler, F. B. I. Situmeang, W. van Eerde, N. M. Wijnberg, *Fluidity in project management teams across projects*, "International Journal of project management", 17 December 2020.

from one project to another, we can define the phenomenon as intactness. On the contrary, we can define fluidity as a lack of intactness. Both approaches have their own advantages. Intactness can allow to use shared cognition, transactive memory and knowledge integration. Furthermore, with intactness team members could benefit from cohesion and mutual trust, which help the team to avoid conflicts and enhance performance. Fluidity, on the contrary, could be very helpful in implementing new competences and new points of view in the team, by enhancing the flourishing of new ideas and different perspectives. Therefore, to conclude, the “optimal intactness” implies a balance of the two opposite extremes: maintaining a sort of routine while continuing to incorporate new knowledge from different sources. Team’s intactness in innovative projects should not be neither too high nor too low, and we can expect an inverted U-shaped relation between intactness and project success<sup>9</sup>.

## **1.2 HACKMAN’S NORMATIVE MODEL**

### 1.2.1 The basics of the model

Sometimes teams might not reach the productivity target levels, make bad decisions, waste the time and the energy of their members and exploit, frustrate or stress them. R. Hackman (1987) has hence studied these phenomena and designed

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<sup>9</sup> C. Buengeler, F. B. I. Situmeang, W. van Eerde, N. M. Wijnberg, *Fluidity in project management teams across projects*, “International Journal of project management”, 17 December 2020.

a normative model that focuses on group effectiveness and on ways of modulating team members' behaviour in order to reach it. Hackman's model is defined "normative" since it provides a guidance to modify the agents' behaviour, which is different from a descriptive model whose main aim is to present and describe a part of the world in order to make explanations and predictions easier<sup>10</sup>.

Hackman's research starts from an input-output framework that was developed by McGrath in 1964. McGrath divides both inputs and outputs into three sets: those that describe individual group members, those that describe the whole group, and those that describe the external environment in which the group operates. Input and outputs are correlated, and the first ones affect the second ones through the interaction that takes place among group members. Therefore, group interaction is the key to understanding why a group is less effective than another one and which ways improve its effectiveness.

Starting from this premise, Hackman designed a normative model of group effectiveness that "*applies only to real groups, groups that have one or more task to perform, resulting in discernible and potentially measurable group products, and groups that operate in an organizational context*"<sup>11</sup>. Once defined the target of the model, it is also important to define the criteria of group effectiveness. It is

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<sup>10</sup> L. Back and M. Jahan, *Normative Models and Their Success*, "Sage Journals", 2020.

<sup>11</sup> J. R. Hackman, *The design of work teams*, Handbook of organizational behaviour, pp. 315-342, 1987.



very difficult to analyse team effectiveness since most organizational tasks do not have a clear right or wrong answer, therefore it is difficult to find some quantitative measures to analyse team's performance. In contrast with the six facets mentioned in the first paragraph, Hackman designed three criteria of team effectiveness that are easier to observe and measure:

- The productive output of the work group should meet or exceed the performance standards that are set by the people who receive and review the output.
- The social processes and relations used to carry out the work should maintain or enhance the capability of team members to work together.
- The group experience should, on balance, satisfy the team members rather than frustrate or stress their personal needs.

The challenge for managers and practitioners is to design teams able to meet these three criteria.

### 1.2.2 Hackman's model key proposition

To explain why some groups perform better than others, the overall effectiveness of teams in organizations has to be considered as a joint function of the total level of effort that the group members spend collectively on a task, the amount of knowledge and skills members bring to bear on the group task and the

appropriateness to the task of the performance strategies used by the group in its work. This key proposition leads us to consider effort, knowledge and skill and performance strategies as process criteria of effectiveness.

To design and manage effective groups, it is possible to focus on three main classes of variables that may affect the process criteria of effectiveness. These three classes of variables are:

- *The design of the group.* It can be defined as the ensemble of the task structure, the group composition and group norms. A good group design guarantees the creation of conditions that make it possible for task-effective behaviours to emerge and persist.

With regard to the effort, a well-designed group has to have motivating and engaging tasks, to have a reward system that provides challenging performance objectives and to have interactions that minimize “social loafing” and promote the emerging of shared commitment. All these factors contribute to forming collective motivation and to give the group challenging tasks that will encourage high effort behaviours.

With regard to knowledge and skill, well-designed groups should have individual members with high task-relevant expertise and interpersonal skills. Furthermore, the number of group members should be large enough to carry out the work but not more than that to not waste people’s time and effort. Finally, membership should be moderately diverse because

homogeneous groups might encounter a lack of resources while heterogeneous groups might have difficulties in getting along well; therefore, a well-designed group should be composed by people who have a different set of skills and knowledge while being similar enough to understand each other and coordinate to work together.

With regard to performance strategies, there is not “one best strategy” to choose that will fit for every group, but it is important to build group-norms that increase the possibility that members will develop a task-appropriate performance strategy. In order to be efficient, these norms have to support self-regulation and to support scanning and strategy planning<sup>12</sup>.

- *The organizational context of the group.* It is composed of the reward, education and information systems of the organization.

With respect to the effort, the reward system can have a great influence. In order to increase effort, it is important to set challenging specific performance objectives and to set positive consequences for excellent performances. It is fundamental to understand what group members value and set adequate rewards in order to incentivize their work. Finally, rewards, as objectives, should focus on group, not individual behaviour. In

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<sup>12</sup> J. R. Hackman, *The design of work teams*, Handbook of organizational behaviour, pp. 315-342, 1987.

fact, giving individual rewards may create dissension and arise conflict among group members; it is therefore better to reward the best group, instead of the best people.

With regard to knowledge and skill, it is fundamental for the organization to provide relevant educational resources and to make them available for the employees through a sort of “delivery system”. A good educational system, in fact, will help teams to obtain the full complement of knowledge and skill required for excellent task performance.

With regard to the performance strategy, it is critical for a group to obtain constant and full information about its performance situation. Furthermore, the information system should also give access to the data and the analytic tools that group members need in order to compare their performance strategy with other possible alternative strategies. In this way, teams will be able to choose the best strategy and to not waste time in un-useful and unproductive procedures<sup>13</sup>.

- *Group synergy resulting from members' interaction.* We define the group synergy as positive when the synergistic gains from group interaction exceed group process losses.

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<sup>13</sup> J. R. Hackman, *The design of work teams*, Handbook of organizational behaviour, pp. 315-342, 1987.

With regard to the effort, group synergy can help to minimize coordination and motivation losses and to create a shared commitment to the team and its work. When people value their membership and are happy to belong to a certain group, they will put more effort on the group task.

With regard to knowledge and skill, it is important to weigh well the contribution of each member to not waste it. Furthermore, it is fundamental to foster collective learning: through group members synergy it is possible to share the acquired knowledge in order to increase the collective knowledge of the group.

With regard to performance strategies, group synergy is useful to minimize slippage in strategy implementation and to create innovative strategic plans. It is in fact fundamental not to postpone too many tasks during project executions, because delays may be too huge and to develop new and original ways to proceed with the group work<sup>14</sup>.

All the elements described above are the characteristics that the normative model proposed by Hackman outline as fundamental to achieve the group effectiveness. Implementing these three classes of variables will help the organization's teams to succeed and perform well.

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<sup>14</sup> J. R. Hackman, *The design of work teams*, Handbook of organizational behaviour, pp. 315-342, 1987.

### 1.2.3 How to create work-teams

Following the model presented above, a work-team should be created so that it ranks high on each of the variables in the model. Anyway, taking into consideration the difficulty in doing that, Hackman proposes also four main stages to follow when creating a work-team<sup>15</sup>.

The first stage is called *prework* and it starts by deciding whether a team is needed or not in order to accomplish a certain task. In fact, a team is not always the best choice and it is fundamental to not form one unless it is necessary. Then, once the need for a group emerges, it is important to understand what are the tasks that need to be accomplished, what are the means and the methods through which the group is going to accomplish them and whether the group will be self-managing, manager-led or self-designing<sup>16</sup>.

The second stage is the *creation of performance conditions*, by making sure that the team has an appropriate design and a supportive organizational context. In fact, the group must be formed by the right number of people and by the people with the right skills and knowledge. Then, the group must also have the right resources in order to achieve its objectives<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> J. R. Hackman, *The design of work teams*, Handbook of organizational behaviour, pp. 315-342, 1987.

<sup>16</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem.

Stage three instead consists in *forming and building the team* in a way that will help it to start with the right foot. To do that, it is important to set boundaries to define who is a member of the team and who has to do each task. Then, it is important to check if every member identifies the task in the same way, because sometimes someone might perceive it differently and this might lead to wasted effort and time. Finally, the group has to state clearly the team norms and each member role, to avoid misunderstanding and process losses<sup>18</sup>.

The last stage is *providing ongoing assistance*, since the group will be auto sufficient but sometimes it may need help, therefore managers have to be ready to give the group assistance and redesign its structure and its processes whether necessary<sup>19</sup>.

### **1.3 COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND VIRTUAL TEAMS**

#### 1.3.1 Virtual teams: definition and history

The term “virtual team” was first used in 1992 and it was conceptualized as a mean to enable organizations to maximize time-zone differences, in order to allow, above all, a customer service that was available 24/7. However, in many organizations the idea of virtual teams became highly liked since it allowed to

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<sup>18</sup> J. R. Hackman, *The design of work teams*, Handbook of organizational behaviour, pp. 315-342, 1987.

<sup>19</sup> Ibidem.

reduce travel and moving costs while giving companies the possibility to recruit and select among an international and global pool of talents, regardless of their physical location<sup>20</sup>.

We can define virtual teams as “*work arrangements where team members are geographically dispersed, have limited face-to-face contact, and work interdependently through the use of electronic communication media to achieve common goals*”<sup>21</sup>.

Even if virtual teams are able to reduce travelling costs, to maximize functional expertise by including professionals who are geographically dispersed and to allow continuous productivity, they also have some negative sides. In particular, soon virtual teams showed to be less productive than face-to-face teams because of communication and collaboration difficulties, lower levels of media richness (compared to face-to-face teams), difficulties in creating team trust and shared responsibilities and a lower potential team engagement.

Moreover, virtual teamwork has a wide ethical dimension that cannot be underestimated. In fact, both the employer and the employee are ethically challenged when implementing remote work. For what concerns the employer, virtual work opens the possibility to hire people all over the world, eliminating

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<sup>20</sup> L. L. Gilson, Patricia Costa, T. A. O’Neill, M. T. Maynard, *Putting the “TEAM” back into virtual teams*, “Organizational Dynamics”, Volume 50, Issue 1, January–March 2021.

<sup>21</sup> J. H. Dulebohn, J. E. Hoch, *Virtual teams in organizations*, “Human Resource Management Review”, Volume 27, Issue 4, Pages 569-574, December 2017.



every border-limit. This means that, potentially, companies could focus on hiring people from countries in which salaries are lower in order to increase their profits at the expense of their home-workers. This is a particular sensitive aspect since it may lead to an increase in unemployment and to a decrease of the GDP<sup>22</sup>.

On the opposite side, for the employees it is easier to work less since they are not constantly controlled and it is more difficult for managers to check whether they are actually working or not. Being out of the office brings into the equation many different possible distractions and interruptions, and this phenomenon may lead to a decrease in the overall production of the company<sup>23</sup>.

For all the reasons mentioned above, in the past the opinion on remote work was negative in many organizations. The digital transformation brought new technologies into the equation, solving some problems both by facilitating communication and coordinating work (e.g. by allowing many people to work simultaneously on the same document), but some difficulties and uncertainties remain still today.

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<sup>22</sup> B. Harward, *How Company Culture Can Survive Remote Work and Be Ethical*, “Ethical Systems”, 2021.

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem.

### 1.3.2 Virtual teams: input-process-outcome framework

Since virtual teams are different from face-to-face ones, they also have different processes of effectiveness. J. Dulebohn and J. Hoch (2017) designed a theoretical framework of virtual team effectiveness, which is the input-process-outcome framework.

First of all, they highlighted three input categories that represent key deterministic criteria for virtual teams: organizational level factors (team design, reward system, information and communication technology, training), leadership factors (virtual teams management skills, transformational leadership, leader member exchange, empowerment) and team composition (surface level diversity, deep level diversity, knowledge, skills, abilities and other individual differences).

Then, they showed that virtual teams need some mediators between the inputs and the outputs they produce. These mediators are team processes, which refer to interdependent acts of team members, and team emergent states that arise out of dynamic team process interaction. These interactions are moderated by virtuality, interdependence and task complexity and the context in which the group operates.

Finally, in the framework we find the outputs, considered as the result of the processes transforming inputs into outcomes. The outcomes are generally valued by the extent to which each task-objective is achieved by the team and by the personal development of each team member in terms of attitudes, satisfaction and commitment.

In conclusion, many characteristics are similar between face-to-face and virtual teams, but the last ones need some additional mediators and moderators to transform inputs into outputs<sup>24</sup>.

### 1.3.3 Covid-19: the implications of virtual teamwork

At the beginning of 2020, the actual percentage of teleworkers increased suddenly and incredibly in every part of the world. For example, in January 2020, the percentage of teleworkers in the US was around 15% while in March 2020 the same percentage was around 50%<sup>25</sup>. This incredible data is due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which is a health global crisis that suddenly accelerated the shift from face-to-face teams into virtual ones. Many workers had to start working full-time remotely and they had to face all the challenges that this sudden change brought. People were forced to stay at home, to find a new work-life balance, to manage fear and emotional stress and to learn how to use new technologies, all at the same time. But, above all, they had to adapt to a different and virtual work environment, by finding a new way to work effectively in their work teams.

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<sup>24</sup> J. H. Dulebohn, J. E. Hoch, *Virtual teams in organizations*, “Human Resource Management Review”, Volume 27, Issue 4, Pages 569-574, December 2017.

<sup>25</sup> A. Whillans, L. Perlow, A. Turek, *Experimenting during the shift to virtual team work: Learnings from how teams adapted their activities during the COVID-19 pandemic*, “Information and Organization”, Volume 31, Issue 1, March 2021.

One of the main challenges that teams had to face during the pandemic was the establishment and the monitoring of team trust. The members of new virtual teams formed during the pandemic had to know each other, to connect to each other and to understand how everyone worked, which was a big challenge. Anyway, an even bigger issue was monitoring team trust in current teams that were already used to work together but suddenly were asked to do so with a higher level of virtuality. In fact, those teams have incurred in episodes of trust violation that, because of the virtual environment, have been less easy to identify. Therefore, it was very important for managers to pay attention to the way team members connected and responded to one another, in order to early identify those episodes and re-establish team trust<sup>26</sup>.

Also, even teams' interactions were challenged by the new virtual environment. Usually, team members have three different types of interactions: task interactions, process interactions and relationships interactions. Task interactions are the interactions occurring within team members in order to complete a core output and they consist of sitting side-by-side sharing feedback, ideas and asking questions on the tasks they executed. Process interactions are the interactions related to deciding and defining the structure of the team's work. Finally, relationship interactions are more related to building and sustaining relationships.

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<sup>26</sup> J. Feitosa, E. Salas, *Today's virtual teams: Adapting lessons learned to the pandemic context*, "Organizational Dynamics", Volume 50, Issue 1, January–March 2021.

The virtual environment made all those interactions more difficult to occur, and it obliged people for a while to do those activities asynchronously and less frequently. Anyway, to facilitate informality in task, process and relationship interactions, team members can use new electronic tools that allow them to ask immediate questions and receive punctual answers in a thread opened to all team members (e.g. Slack, Skype, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, etc.). Furthermore, it is advisable for team members to check some processes on daily basis during team meetings and, in order to enhance personal relationships, to try knowing each other better, also showing more compassion and openness to the others<sup>27</sup>.

A third big challenge has to be found in process gains that include team coordination, cooperation and communication, three activities that are naturally easier when an activity is carried out in presence. During Covid-19 pandemic it happened to see losses in communication and cooperation in virtual teams, because people were worried about their health and job security and the virtual environment gave less space for information exchange. Anyway, with the right means, new communication norms can be set, and the process losses can be turned into process gains allowing virtual teams to have even more information exchange than before.

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<sup>27</sup> L. L. Gilson, T. A. O'Neill, P. Costa, *Introduction to the Special Issue on Virtual Teams*, "Organizational Dynamics", Volume 50, Issue 1, January–March 2021.

Another important element that allows team members to work well is psychological safety, which can be described as the feeling of being included and of belonging to someone else's space. In teams, people need to feel it in order to freely express their opinion and to cooperate with their team members. Anyway, building this feeling in a virtual reality is very difficult, and in order to achieve it, it is advisable for people to learn as much as possible about each other on a virtual platform<sup>28</sup>.

Finally, even if taskwork is important, it is fundamental for team members to focus on teamwork. When people do not work in the same place, it is in fact frequent to lose the sense of belonging to the team and to its general objectives, focusing only on carrying out its single tasks. It is therefore important for people to always remember that they are part of a team, and that collaboration, cooperation and communication are fundamental. Constructive feedbacks and assessing collaborative behaviours might help to reduce this risk<sup>29</sup>.

To face all those challenges brought by Covid-19, teams need to be resilient. Virtual team resilience is "*the capacity to bounce back from a setback that results in a loss of virtual team processes*"<sup>30</sup>. The resources of virtual team resilience are:

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<sup>28</sup> J. Feitosa, E. Salas, *Today's virtual teams: Adapting lessons learned to the pandemic context*, "Organizational Dynamics", Volume 50, Issue 1, January–March 2021.

<sup>29</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>30</sup> B. L. Kirkman, A. C. Stoverink, *Building resilient virtual teams*, "Organizational Dynamics", Volume 50, Issue 1, January–March 2021.

- *Virtual team potency*, which is the shared belief that team members can be effective at accomplishing all of their tasks. Team members need to think that they can truly achieve whatever is required, so that they will actually achieve it.
- *Virtual team mental model of teamwork*, as all team members need to know exactly which are their roles, responsibilities, knowledge and skills.
- *Virtual team's capacity to improvise*, that is a team's ability to quickly develop something new out of existing resources when needed. This capacity is composed by transactive memory and creativity.
- *Virtual team's psychological safety*, as said above, the belief that it is safe for people to take interpersonal risks.

If a virtual team has these four characteristics, then it is resilient and it can face adversity by minimizing it, managing it and then mending after it. In fact, it is possible to minimize the adversity by preparing, detecting, sensemaking and strategizing for risks. Then, when a strategy has been prepared, it has to be executed during adversity. Finally, once the adversity has been faced, the virtual team can process and reflect on any mistake, in order to learn new things, adapt to a new reality and be prepared for future adversities<sup>31</sup>. Those steps have not to be executed on a precise timeline since every team has to find out when it is better to

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<sup>31</sup> B. L. Kirkman, A. C. Stoverink, *Building resilient virtual teams*, "Organizational Dynamics", Volume 50, Issue 1, January–March 2021.

put in place each step. Anyway, since resilience is defined as the ability to bounce back from an adversity, it implies that, by applying its principles, the team succeeds in achieving its objectives respecting its pre-defined deadlines.

The adversity-facing strategy outlined above can be used by resilient virtual teams to face any obstacle they find in carrying out their activities, helping these particular units of work to overcome their difficulties and to turn them into strengths. This is how many virtual teams during Covid-19 pandemic, even with some initial difficulties and challenges, were successful.



## **CHAPTER II**

### **LEADERSHIP**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

As stated in the first chapter, teamwork has a great influence on the success of projects in organizations. Anyway, even if in every team collaboration, coordination and communication are always important, it is also fundamental to have a great leader who drives the team to success. In fact, many theories show the importance of leadership in project management, revealing that it is a key variable to increase team effectiveness and to achieve the objectives of a project.

To name one of the scholars, Momanyi Theophanus (2019) conducted a study on the influence of leadership on project management, and his research showed that a positive correlation between leadership and performance exists and that leadership components as leadership skills, leadership experience, leadership quality and leadership styles can lead to a change in project performance by 69.5%. Furthermore, the study shows that leadership can inspire individuals by increasing their commitment and their motivation, a factor leading to a better performance in the workplace. Thirdly, the research demonstrates that great leadership ensures positive attitudes and culture at the workplace, thus promoting productivity.

Finally, a good directing activity ensures the sharing of common values, goals and views, which definitely increases project productivity and project quality.

Since the positive correlation between leadership and project management has largely been demonstrated, it is therefore fundamental to understand which leadership style is the best one in project management and which are the main characteristics that form a great project leader. In this chapter we are going to try to understand these issues, by analysing different leadership styles and different leadership variables that can influence project success. Finally, in the last paragraph of the chapter, we are going to study the changes that Covid-19 pandemic drove on leadership and the challenges that project leaders had to face in the shift from face-to-face to virtual teams.

## **2.1 LEADERSHIP: DEFINITION AND DIFFERENT STYLES**

A leader can be defined as *“a person who delegates or influencing others to act so as to carry out specified objectives”*<sup>32</sup>.

Leadership, instead, can be defined as *“a social influence process in which the leader seeks the voluntary participation of subordinates in an effort to reach*

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<sup>32</sup> T.S. Nanjundeswaraswamy, D.R. Swamy, *Leadership Styles*, “Advances In Management”, Vol. 7(2), February 2014.

*organization goals*”<sup>33</sup>. An effective leader can influence team members in order to reach specific objectives.

Adair (1973) defined three essential roles of the project leader:

- Define the task, since the leader has to state clearly what the group has to do.
- Achieve the task, because the leader has to focus on the results of the group, and he has to ensure that the group’s purpose is fulfilled by achieving the team objectives.
- Maintain effective relationships in two ways, between himself and the members of the group and within the team members. Those relations are essential to achieve team success and they can be divided into those concerned with the team morale and its sense of purpose, and those concerned with individuals and how they are motivated.

Anyway, these three roles can be performed by using different methods and different approaches, that constitute different leadership styles. Among the leadership theories, we find:

- *Situational theory*, which states that leaders should make their decisions according to the various situations the organization faces. This means that leaders have to be dynamic and know how to adapt to different situations

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<sup>33</sup> T.S. Nanjundeswaraswamy, D.R. Swamy, *Leadership Styles*, “Advances In Management”, Vol. 7(2), February 2014.

and environments, in order to lead the team into facing any situation and solving any problem<sup>34</sup>.

- *Trait theory*, which states that every leader is born with some characteristics such as motivational traits, honesty, integrity, enterprising spirit, etc., that define them as leaders. Furthermore, this theory states that leaders should appreciate diversity among employees, and that they can create the right organizational culture to support the arising of the desirable traits to achieve project success<sup>35</sup>.
- *Behavioural theory*, which states that leaders are not always born like that, but they can also be made. This theory says that numerous elements can influence human behaviour, such as physical, personal, psychological, and environmental factors. Project leaders can use these factors in order to change team member behaviours and achieve the desired outcomes<sup>36</sup>.
- *Participative theory*, which states that leaders should always consider the inputs of teamwork and should focus on helping the team members to feel

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<sup>34</sup> M. Ebrahim, *Leadership & project management*, “Research Gate”, August 2016.

<sup>35</sup> M. Ebrahim, *Leadership & project management*, “Research Gate”, August 2016 – M. N, Theophanus, *A Study on the Influence of Project Leadership on Project Management and Performance*, “Research Square”, October 2020.

<sup>36</sup> Ibidem.

part of the organization's success. In order to do so, team building activities are particularly important<sup>37</sup>.

- *Servant leadership theory*, which suggests that leaders should prioritize the needs and the expectations of project teams instead of their own. This will help team members to be more satisfied and to work harder and to achieve better results<sup>38</sup>.
- *Autocratic theory*, which states that leaders should be the key decision makers of every phase of the project and that they should determine every aspect and every parameter of it.<sup>39</sup>
- *Democratic theory*, which is the opposite of the autocratic theory mentioned above. This theory promotes the inclusion of every team member and social equality by sharing the decision-making process<sup>40</sup>.
- *Participative leadership theory*, which is an evolution of the democratic theory and promotes the direct inclusion of every team-member in the decision-making process, so that they can also contribute to the decisions of the organization and develop a higher sense of belonging<sup>41</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> M. N, Theophanus, *A Study on the Influence of Project Leadership on Project Management and Performance*, "Research Square", October 2020.

<sup>38</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>39</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>40</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>41</sup> Ibidem.

- *Leader-member exchange theory*, which enhances the fact that information should equally flow from team members to leaders and from leaders to team members, in order to enforce coordination and cooperation<sup>42</sup>.
- *Path-goal theory*, which states that leaders should simply follow the path designed to achieve the goal they want employees to attain, in order to actually let them achieve it and ensure project success<sup>43</sup>.
- *Action centred leadership theory*, which says that the project leader should focus on the task, the team and the individual by acting on the demands of each. The leader should focus on each one at a different time in order to achieve success. In task orientation, achieving team objectives is the most important thing. In team orientation the leader should focus on maintaining cohesion and identifying the team collective needs. In individual orientation, the leader should recognize and focus on the individual needs of each team member<sup>44</sup>.
- *McGregor's theory*, which states that there exist two types of approaches to leadership: theory X and theory Y. Theory X is people-oriented while Theory Y is production-oriented. The first one assumes that people are

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<sup>42</sup> M. N, Theophanus, *A Study on the Influence of Project Leadership on Project Management and Performance*, "Research Square", October 2020.

<sup>43</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>44</sup> B. Zulch, *Leadership communication in project management*, "Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 119", pp. 172 – 181, 2014.

lazy for nature and that they would do anything in order to avoid work and responsibilities, therefore leaders should force them to work in order to achieve results. Theory Y, on the contrary, assumes that people enjoy working and having responsibilities, therefore team members might also be able to work and manage themselves independently. The role of the leader is the one clearly stating the objectives in order to achieve them<sup>45</sup>.

- *Transactional theory*, which relies on the principle of giving rewards to team members who achieve specific goals or performance criteria. The transactional leader will first of all validate the relationship between the performance and the reward by stating the performance objectives, and then he will exchange the reward for an appropriate response, encouraging his subordinates to improve their performance. Therefore, transactional leaders focus on task completion by using rewards and punishments<sup>46</sup>.
- *Transformational theory*, which states that leaders should concentrate on the personal development of their subordinates in order to foster the development of the entire team and to help it to achieve its objectives. Transformational leaders focus on developing the right value system, the right motivation and the right behaviours of team members, encouraging

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<sup>45</sup> B. Zulch, *Leadership communication in project management*, “Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 119”, pp. 172 – 181, 2014.

<sup>46</sup> M. N, Theophanus, *A Study on the Influence of Project Leadership on Project Management and Performance*, “Research Square”, October 2020.

them to see problems from new perspectives. Furthermore, the transformational leader communicates a vision, supports and encourages his followers and stimulates emotion and identification in the organization; he wants literally to “transform” individual-level variables<sup>47</sup>.

All these theories are valid and are applied by managers all over the world, depending on which approach they prefer and which they consider more effective.

D. Rooke and W. R. Torbert (2005) also added that leaders are differentiated by their action logic, which is how they interpret both their own and others' behaviours, how they maintain power and manage the team. They identified seven profiles of action logic: the opportunist, the diplomat, the expert, the achiever, the individualist, the strategist and the alchemist. The opportunist wants to achieve the result in any way possible, it is more self-oriented and people usually do not follow him for long, but he is very good during emergencies and in pursuing sales. The diplomat wants to belong to the team, therefore he avoids any type of conflict enhancing the cohesion of the team, but he is unable to make hard decisions to improve performance. The expert uses his technical knowledge in order to achieve the results, he is a good contributor, but he shows a lack of emotional intelligence. The achiever meets strategic goals by enhancing teamwork, but he is unable to think outside the box. The individualist operates in unconventional ways and

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<sup>47</sup> M. N, Theophanus, *A Study on the Influence of Project Leadership on Project Management and Performance*, Research Square, October 2020.



ignores rules, but he is unable to work in a team and he irritates his colleagues by ignoring key organizational processes. The strategist generates organizational and personal change in the short and the long term, he is highly collaborative, and he brings new visions into the organization. The alchemist generates social transformation, by changing significantly and historically the organization<sup>48</sup>. The two authors of the article also state that those action logic types can change and can be changed by leaders, assessing that it is possible to change the leadership style according to the situation whether necessary<sup>49</sup>.

## **2.2 PROJECT MANAGEMENT LEADERSHIP STYLE: WHICH IS THE BEST?**

As stated in the first paragraph, there are several leadership styles all valid and used by project managers all over the world. Anyway, is there a better leadership style to choose?

Many studies have shown that there is not a universal leadership style that would help managers to succeed in every project but that every leadership style could be effective if applied to the right type of project.

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<sup>48</sup> D. Rooke and W. R. Torbert, *Seven Transformations of Leadership*, “The Essential Guide of Leadership, Harvard Business Review”, 2005.

<sup>49</sup> Ibidem.

R. Muller and J.R. Turner (2006)<sup>50</sup> suggest that both the manager's leadership style influences the performance and that different styles of leadership are appropriate for different types of project. In particular, they conducted a study in order to understand whether there are some key characteristics which are more effective than others according to the types of project. They found out that the key elements to succeed on medium complexity projects are emotional resilience and communication, while for high complexity projects sensitivity is very important. Furthermore, motivation is fundamental on repositioning projects while self-awareness and communication are very important leadership characteristics on renewal projects. On fixed price projects, the key elements are sensitivity and communication while influence and communication are very effective behaviours on remeasurement projects. Also, on home-based multicultural projects, motivation and the capability of managing resources are very important. Finally, different leadership styles are needed in the different phases of the production life-cycle: during the design stage, managing resources well is very important while, on the commissioning stage, motivation and sensitivity are fundamental. Furthermore, during feasibility and close-out, the strategic perspective might be important, but it may be detrimental in other phases of the life-cycle. Therefore, the conclusion of the study is that it is crucial for leaders to

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<sup>50</sup> R. Muller, J. R. Turner, *Matching the project manager's leadership style to project type*, "International Journal of Project Management 25", 2007.

match the right leadership competences and, therefore, the right leadership style to the project type and to the project phase in order to achieve project success<sup>51</sup>.

According to R. Mullers and J.R. Turner's study, it seems that transformational leadership style is more applicable and suitable for more situations than transactional leadership style. This is because, for many types of projects, communication and motivation are key leadership competencies and these elements are characteristics of transformational leadership. Anyway, it is always advisable to identify the key characteristics of the project according to its type and try to match them to the right leadership style, in order to achieve the best results possible.

### **2.3 KEY COMPETENCES FOR PROJECT LEADERS**

Even if sometimes some leadership styles are better than others, there are some universal key competences that project leaders should have in order to be able to carry out their job. Those key competences are leadership traits that differentiate a leader from a common team member.

A successful leader has to play different roles simultaneously and he has to have some leadership skills such as: the capacity of planning activities, tasks schedule and budgets, the capacity of selecting, placing and organizing the project team,

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<sup>51</sup> R. Muller, J. R. Turner, *Matching the project manager's leadership style to project type*, "International Journal of Project Management 25", 2007.

the ability of negotiating and persuading, the ability of understanding and problem solving, the ability of decision making, the ability of motivating team members, the ability of communicating with the project team and the stakeholders, and an emotional intelligence. All these skills are fundamental in order to inspire the team and lead it to success<sup>52</sup>.

The ability of motivating team members is particularly important, since leaders have to be coaches, initiators and motivators. They have to motivate people and to maintain the motivation high throughout the entire project cycle<sup>53</sup>.

*“A motive is a reason for doing something. Motivation is the strength and direction of behaviour and the factors that influence people to behave in certain ways”*<sup>54</sup>. People are motivated when they expect their actions to produce a certain result, that may be the achievement of an objective or a reward. The three components of motivation are direction, that is what a person is trying to do, effort, which is how hard a person is trying, and persistence, which is for how long a person will continue trying. There are two types of motivation: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. The intrinsic motivation is generated by the work itself, it takes place when the individuals feel that their work and their

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<sup>52</sup> B. Zulch, *Leadership communication in project management*, “Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 119”, pp. 172 – 181, 2014.

<sup>53</sup> M. Ebrahim, *Leadership & project management*, “Research Gate”, August 2016.

<sup>54</sup> M. Armstrong and S. Taylor, *Armstrong’s Handbook of Human Resource Management Practice*, Kogan Page, 2014.

contribution is important, interesting and challenging and that it provides them with the opportunity to achieve, learn and improve their capabilities and skills. In order to increase intrinsic motivation, project leaders can foster autonomy by encouraging people to set their schedule and on getting work done, increase mastery by helping people to find out how to improve in their work and focus on purpose when explaining how and why to do something<sup>55</sup>.

Extrinsic motivation, on the contrary, occurs when things are done expressly in order to increase people's motivation. This includes rewards and punishments<sup>56</sup>.

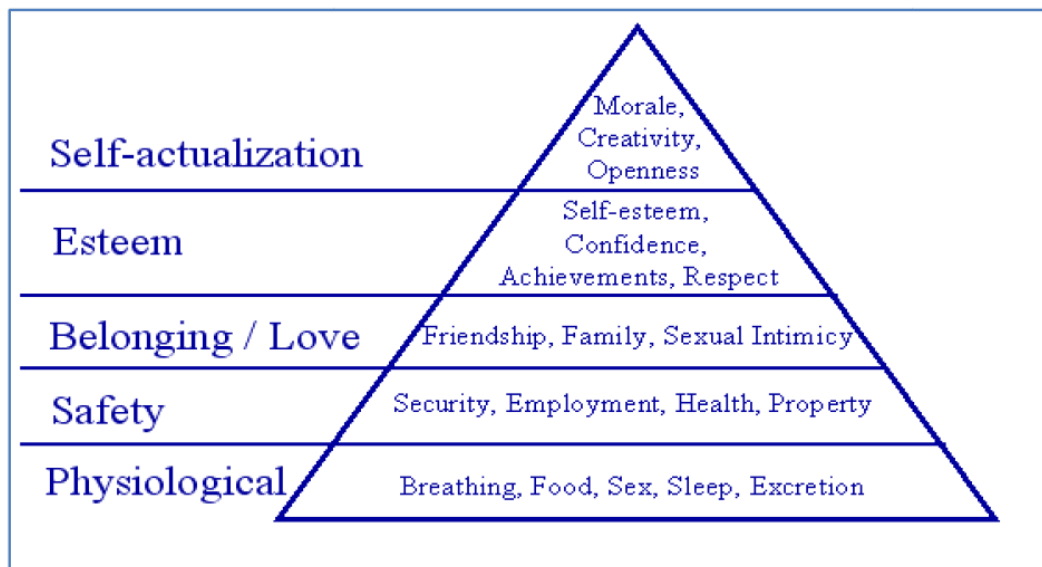


Figure II.1 – Maslow Pyramid Theory (M. Ebrahim, 2016)

<sup>55</sup> M. Armstrong and S. Taylor, *Armstrong's Handbook of Human Resource Management Practice*, Kogan Page, 2014.

<sup>56</sup> Ibidem.

A good project leader has to use rewards, but he also has to focus on increasing the intrinsic motivation by looking at the needs of his team members. According to the Maslow pyramid theory, the needs of the employees can be classified into five classes (figure II.1) on which the leader should focus.

To sum up, being able to motivate is a key leadership characteristic, since it helps leaders to bring out team member's energy and effort in order to achieve the desired results.

Then, another fundamental key leadership characteristic is communication. Many times leaders fail because of poor people and interpersonal skills, such as ineffective communication that arises from arrogance, disorganization, negativism and distrust<sup>57</sup>. Managers need to communicate to their employees the objectives of the company and of the project, the tasks to carry out to achieve certain objectives and the expected result from their work. Leaders need to communicate to the team their ideas, directions and changes and team members have the right to answer with their reactions and comments. Communication needs to be clear, easy to understand and concise in order to be effective. Information should be precise and presented regularly and systematically<sup>58</sup>.

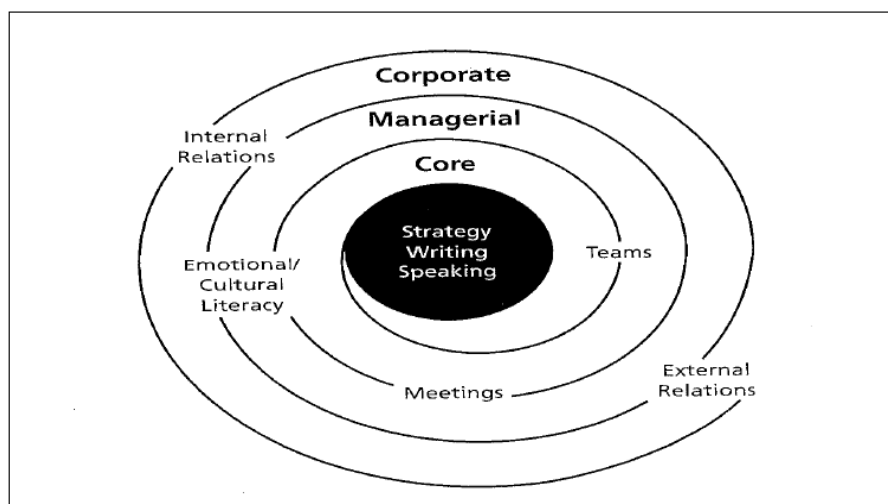
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<sup>57</sup> B. Zulch, *Leadership communication in project management*, "Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 119", pp. 172 – 181, 2014.

<sup>58</sup> M. Armstrong and S. Taylor, *Armstrong's Handbook of Human Resource Management Practice*, Kogan Page, 2014.

Barrett (2006) states that leadership communication is formed by three components:

- *Core communication*, that focuses on the characteristics at the core of figure 2.2 below. All effective communication depends on the core skills at the centre of the spiral, that are speaking, writing and strategy and are more individual characteristics.
- *Managerial communication*, that include capabilities built on the core abilities and that are more directly involved in managing others.
- *Corporate communication*, that is the expansion of the managerial skills and are needed to lead an organization and address a broader community, which is the ensemble of internal and external stakeholders<sup>59</sup>.



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<sup>59</sup> B. Zulch, *Leadership communication in project management*, “Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 119”, pp. 172 – 181, 2014.

*Figure II.2 – Leadership communication framework (B. Zulch, 2014)*

The ensemble of the above-mentioned communication skills will enable leaders to foster and create understanding and trust and to achieve team success.

Finally, emotional intelligence is another fundamental key competence for project leaders. Emotional intelligence is described by Mayer and Salovey as “*the ability to perceive accurately, appraise and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth*”<sup>60</sup>.

The relation among emotional intelligence and project leadership is very strong because emotional intelligence facilitates interpersonal relationships which are essential for developing trust and commitment in projects that are, by nature, temporary. Then, emotional intelligence supports knowledge exchange and helps project managers to inspire team members and to generate a high level of commitment and motivation. In fact, understanding the employee’s emotions is fundamental in order to understand their behaviour and inspire them to do their best. Therefore, leaders should adopt listening and coaching behaviours in order

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<sup>60</sup> N. Clarke, *Emotional intelligence and its relationship to transformational leadership and key project manager competences*, “Project Management Journal”, April 2010.



to facilitate openness and emotional expression, that will lead to an increased team trust and motivation and, consequently, to project success<sup>61</sup>.

To sum up, emotional intelligence, communication skills and the ability to enhance motivation are all key leadership competencies that every leader should have in order to manage his team in the best way possible. But, how do leaders acquire these soft skills? Many times, these soft skills are naturally present in true leaders, anyway they can be also developed and acquired. There are strategic skill-building trainings aimed at producing a meaningful and long-lasting change in people's behaviours using some insights from neuro and cognitive sciences. These trainings believe in structuring the learning experience on active involvement of participants, which is the best way to make people learn and actually develop some soft skills<sup>62</sup>. However, those trainings are not enough because, even if people get to know theoretically what they are supposed to do, they need to practice to actually obtain results and interiorize leadership's main soft skills. It is therefore fundamental to combine training and on-field experience to develop the key competences that leaders need to lead project's teams with success<sup>63</sup>.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>62</sup> R. Crosbie, *Learning the soft skills of leadership*, "Emerald Insight", 2005.

<sup>63</sup> Ibidem.

## **2.4 COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND VIRTUAL TEAM LEADERSHIP**

As stated in the first chapter, the Covid-19 pandemic brought some changes into the working environment by suddenly obliging teams to shift from face-to-face to virtual collaboration. At first, this new environment may seem easy to deal with, because people are supposed to do the same things they used to do in their office, but by using technologies as a mean of communication. Anyway, Deloitte has reported that virtual teaming inhibits innovation by 93%, trust by 83% and engagement by 80%, and the Gartner Group has stated that from 50% to 82% of virtual team fails because of problems in understanding project goals and tasks, in communication and in forming team's trust and cohesion. This is because, in an office, people can feel a strong connection to the corporate culture thanks to signs and symbols, while working from home results in a more difficult connection with the organizational culture's values, beliefs and norms. Furthermore, people can suffer from a loss in trust and in frequency of informal communication, which will inhibit team's collaboration. That's why the role of leadership is fundamental, in order to overcome all these issues and problems and to ensure the team's success over time. 58% of virtual team members state that their leaders are not appropriately prepared to lead virtually, therefore it is essential for leaders to train well in order to lead virtual teams into success<sup>64</sup>.

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<sup>64</sup> S. W.J. Kozlowski, G. T. Chao, J. Van Fossen, "*Leading virtual teams*", "Organizational Dynamics Volume 50", Issue 1, January–March 2021.

There are three primary complications that create difficulties in leading virtual teams: task complexity, cultural diversity and membership stability. “*Task complexity refers to the degree of workflow interdependence that links team members together*”<sup>65</sup>, which can be high for pooled and intensive tasks and lower for sequential tasks. “*Cultural diversity is the extent to which team members are drawn from different national/cultural backgrounds*”<sup>66</sup>, and it can be useful to have a richness of points of view, perspectives and ideas but it can make communication, collaboration and consensus more difficult. Finally, membership stability is “*the extent to which the members of a virtual team are permanent for the duration of the team or whether there are outflows or inflows of members as a project makes progress*”<sup>67</sup> since, as a project advances, some skills may be needed, and some members might be added to the group, while others will leave. In order to overcome these difficulties and lead a virtual team successfully, there are some steps and some techniques that project leaders can follow. When building a virtual team because of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is important for team leaders to establish and explain the new reality to their team members. The new reality brought by the Covid-19 pandemic created big challenges and big changes in every organization’s structure and reality, therefore it is fundamental for leaders

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<sup>65</sup> S. W.J. Kozlowski, G. T. Chao, J. Van Fossen, “*Leading virtual teams*”, “*Organizational Dynamics Volume 50*”, Issue 1, January–March 2021.

<sup>66</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>67</sup> Ibidem.

to be transparent and clear with their employees about every single change the organization might be taking about the corporate strategy or other decisions that may impact on work activities<sup>68</sup>.

Then, when building a virtual team, it is fundamental to ensure technological fluency by deciding the technology that will be used for team communications and informing all the team members clearly. Since teams are composed by people of different ages and different experiences with technological means, it is important to be sure that everyone is able to use the selected technologies and that these technologies meet team member's needs<sup>69</sup>. To facilitate the adoption of new technologies, leaders have to adopt policies, procedures and systems to support the virtual team members and to avoid the uncertainty related to remote working<sup>70</sup>. If needed, leaders can also involve technology facilitators who can train remote workers to use the new technology efficiently<sup>71</sup>.

After deciding the technologies to use, the project leaders must ensure that all the team members have clearly understood the goals to reach and the mutual tasks to

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<sup>68</sup> S. A. Newman, R. C. Ford, *Five Steps to Leading Your Team in the Virtual COVID-19 Workplace*, "Organizational Dynamics Volume 50", Issue 1, January–March 2021.

<sup>69</sup> S. W. J. Kozlowski, G. T. Chao, J. Van Fossen, *Leading virtual teams*, "Organizational Dynamics Volume 50", Issue 1, January–March 2021.

<sup>70</sup> S. A. Newman, R. C. Ford, *Five Steps to Leading Your Team in the Virtual COVID-19 Workplace*, "Organizational Dynamics Volume 50", Issue 1, January–March 2021.

<sup>71</sup> S. W. J. Kozlowski, G. T. Chao, J. Van Fossen, *Leading virtual teams*, "Organizational Dynamics Volume 50", Issue 1, January–March 2021.

accomplish. In face-to-face teams the sense of team culture is developed naturally when people spend time together, but in virtual teams this is more difficult, making it necessary for leaders to set ground rules to establish team norms. To do that, leaders should explicit more information about how they want the team to behave and what is the amount of time team members are expected to devote to the team<sup>72</sup>.

Then, leaders should establish a shared knowledge base because, in order to perform well, people need to know clearly their unique roles and what is expected from them. In order to achieve this result, leaders have to constantly monitor their team and to implement a continuous communication of member's understandings<sup>73</sup>.

Another important element when forming a team is to build trust and team cohesion. We refer to trust as a “*dynamic shared state that emerges within work teams*”. We can divide trust into<sup>74</sup> cognitive trust, which is the extent to which team members rely on each other's competences, and affective trust, which refers to the emotional bonds that link together team members.

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<sup>72</sup> S. W. J. Kozlowski, G. T. Chao, J. Van Fossen, *Leading virtual teams*, “Organizational Dynamics Volume 50”, Issue 1, January–March 2021.

<sup>73</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>74</sup> J. V. Dinh, D. L. Reyes, L. Kayga, C. Lindgren, J. Feitosa, E. Salas, *Developing team trust: Leader insights for virtual settings*, “Organizational Dynamics Volume 50”, Issue 1, January–March 2021.

Project leaders can use some techniques in order to increase both cognitive and affective trust. For what concerns cognitive trust, leaders can enhance it by outlining shared goals, benefits and risks, by setting boundaries and team norms, by constantly monitoring team members' engagement and by identifying clear roles. Affective trust, on the contrary, might be fostered by developing an inclusive community through psychological safety, by developing a sense of commitment to the organization, by connecting personally with the team members talking not only about work but also about personal issues, and by encouraging collaboration. Leaders should implement these practices in a strategic way, taking into account the fact that they are synergic since improving cognitive trust they might also improve affective trust and vice-versa. Leaders have to choose the best techniques case-by-case and they have to constantly monitor team trust in order to ensure employees' well-being and team's success<sup>75</sup>. Finally, to maintain team trust during the time, it is advisable to organize informal virtual team building events to encourage communication and mutual understanding among teammates<sup>76</sup>.

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<sup>75</sup> J. V. Dinh, D. L. Reyes, L. Kayga, C. Lindgren, J. Feitosa, E. Salas, *Developing team trust: Leader insights for virtual settings*, "Organizational Dynamics Volume 50", Issue 1, January–March 2021.

<sup>76</sup> S. W. J. Kozlowski, G. T. Chao, J. Van Fossen, *Leading virtual teams*, "Organizational Dynamics Volume 50", Issue 1, January–March 2021.

When a new member enters the team, leaders have to be sure that he fits it and that he will adjust to it by absorbing all the principles and the norms previously defined. Without face-to-face communication and personal contacts, it might be more difficult for a newcomer to merge with the team, therefore it is fundamental the role of the leader that can, for example, explain the team's history to the new member to help him understand it better. Moreover, the leader can prepare existing team members for the arrival of the newcomer, so that they will be prepared to welcome him, and he can also designate a team member to mentor the newcomer, so that he will help him to enter into the inner workings of the team<sup>77</sup>. Furthermore, in order to increase virtual team possibility of success, it is advisable for leaders to encourage shared leadership, a strategy in which *“leadership functions are distributed among team members and team members manage each another as they work towards team goals and engage in collaborative decision-making”*<sup>78</sup>. Teams with shared leadership are more likely to perform well because collective acting coordinates effort more effectively. Applying this strategy does not imply that leaders will lose their role as the team's guide, but they have an essential role in implementing shared leadership and monitoring it through the time. Leaders have to identify the leadership skills of each team member,

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<sup>77</sup> S. W. J. Kozlowski, G. T. Chao, J. Van Fossen, *Leading virtual teams*, “Organizational Dynamics Volume 50”, Issue 1, January–March 2021.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibidem*.

choosing the best role for them. Then, they have to train team members to take leadership roles and to encourage the team to share information in order to foster collaboration. Finally, leaders have to check on misunderstandings and conflicts in order to solve them whether they arise among team members<sup>79</sup>.

For what concerns virtual teams' communication, it has to be frequent, clear and effective. It is in fact fundamental for a leader to check on team members frequently in order to see how they feel about their tasks and the team and what are their needs, to communicate clearly in order to avoid misunderstanding and consequent uncertainty, and to choose the right means according to the type of communication. It is advisable for leaders to schedule weekly one on one meetings in order to reach out to their team members singularly and connect personally with them, and also to schedule weekly team meetings to resume the main communications and check on the team's progresses and needs<sup>80</sup>.

Finally, in order to manage a virtual team effectively, it is always important to remember that the virtual environment may be challenging for many people and that it is essential to remember to everyone that it is psychologically safe, that they are still valued by the organization and that they are not alone but constantly

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<sup>79</sup> S. A. Newman, R. C. Ford, *Five Steps to Leading Your Team in the Virtual COVID-19 Workplace*, "Organizational Dynamics Volume 50", Issue 1, January–March 2021.

<sup>80</sup> Ibidem.



supported in their needs<sup>81</sup>. It is fundamental not to take too much advantage of the flexible working hours typical of remote working, but to always encourage team members to find a healthy work-life balance, in order to avoid stress and burnout. Leaders can help the employees by structuring the work with a consistent schedule and giving a good example by being the first ones in setting boundaries between work and personal life<sup>82</sup>.

All these recommendations and strategies can be applied by effective leaders to manage virtual teams in the best way possible and to overcome the challenges brought by remote working and Covid-19 pandemic.

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<sup>81</sup> S. A. Newman, R. C. Ford, *Five Steps to Leading Your Team in the Virtual COVID-19 Workplace*, “Organizational Dynamics Volume 50”, Issue 1, January–March 2021.

<sup>82</sup> S. W. J. Kozlowski, G. T. Chao, J. Van Fossen, *Leading virtual teams*, “Organizational Dynamics Volume 50”, Issue 1, January–March 2021.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **TEAMWORK AND LEADERSHIP IN NPOs**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

In today's social and economic environment there are different organizations operating for different purposes. We can make a major and simplified distinction between Public Administrations (PA), enterprises and non-profit organizations. The term public administration refers to all the organizations involved in the implementation of government policies and which are directly directed by the sovereign State. On the contrary, enterprise is a term used in the commercial world to describe a project or a venture undertaken for gain and, usually, by extension, it refers to the business entity carrying out the enterprise<sup>83</sup>. Finally, the expression non-profit organization (NPO) refers to an entity operating for a public, collective or social benefit and who does not have the profit as its main aim.

This last type of organization is particularly interesting because it is structurally different from an enterprise and, therefore, teams have to be managed differently and leaders have to carry out their role differently. This is the reason why the present chapter is focused on understanding the specificities of non-profit

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<sup>83</sup> Glossary of statistical terms, OECD, 2002.

organizations, focusing on the way teams and leaders behave in NPOs and on the processes of project management and implementation in NPOs. Finally, the last paragraph of the chapter is focused on the effects that Covid-19 pandemic had on the third sector and on the specificities of international virtual teams.

### **3.1 NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS**

#### 3.1.1 Non-profit and for-profit organizations: main differences

As stated in the introduction, non-profit organizations are different from normal companies and those differences lead also to different leadership styles and different approaches to teamwork.

The main difference between a for-profit and a non-profit organization is the purpose. For-profit organizations have a variety of aims, but their main aim is generating profit and, therefore, developing a product or a service that has a certain value to the customers. This profit can be reinvested in the organization or can be kept by owners. On the contrary, a NPO does not prioritize profit but it focuses more on promoting a social cause and on helping the society by solving potential life-threatening problems and issues<sup>84</sup>. This does not mean that a NPO can't be profitable, but it means that the majority of its profits have to be invested

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<sup>84</sup> C. McNamara, *Two Basic Types of Organizations: For-Profit (Business) and Nonprofit*, Free Management Library.

in the pursuing of the organizations' mission<sup>85</sup>. This difference leads also to a different way of measuring success: in enterprises success is measured based on how much they gain, while in NPOs success is measured by the extent they achieve their philanthropic mission<sup>86</sup>.

Another big difference between the two concerns the way they finance their activities. For-profit organizations initially finance their activities through bank loans and local investors, and then they continue funding them through their sales revenues. Non-profit organizations, on the contrary, generally use a different approach by looking for private donations, corporate sponsorship and public grants to finance their projects<sup>87</sup>.

A third big difference between for-profit and non-profit organizations is their audience: while for-profit organizations usually have a more specific target depending on the products they sell, NPOs have a wider audience because, instead of simply selling products, they typically approach their audience with a message and a mission that has to be achieved also through the selling of products<sup>88</sup>.

Then, for-profit organizations and NPOs differ because of their organizational culture since the first ones tend to focus more on business metrics such as key

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<sup>85</sup> K. Leonard, *Non Profit Organization Vs. Profit Organization*, Chron, 12<sup>th</sup> February 2019.

<sup>86</sup> Norwich University, *7 Key Differences Between Nonprofit and For-profit Organizations*, Norwich University website, 2016.

<sup>87</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>88</sup> Ibidem.

performance indicators (KPIs), while the second ones are more community-oriented. This means that for-profit organizations tend to encourage all the behaviours that can lead to an increase in the short and long-term revenue for the company, while non-profit organizations tend to encourage all the behaviours that increase the sense of belonging to the organization, leading the employees to advocate for the NPO also outside their working hours<sup>89</sup>.

Also, the workforce of a non-profit is different from the workforce of a for-profit because enterprises usually have employees and interns who are paid for their work, while NPOs generally rely on volunteers who are intangibly rewarded with the satisfaction that derives by the accomplishment of the organization's mission<sup>90</sup>.

Finally, one last big difference concerns taxation because non-profit organizations are usually exempt by law by the payment of some taxes<sup>91</sup>.

### 3.1.2 Non-profit organizations: principles for excellence

As companies do, also NPOs can increase their performance in order to reach their goals in a faster and more effective way. In order to do that, there are some basic principles that non-profit organizations have to follow:

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<sup>89</sup> Norwich University, *7 Key Differences Between Nonprofit and For-profit Organizations*, Norwich University website, 2016

<sup>90</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>91</sup> Ibidem.

- *To create an effective communication system.* For NPOs the most important thing is communicating effectively their mission and values, therefore it is fundamental to have a good system for internal communications, marketing and media relations. The internal communication helps to motivate the employees and the volunteers and to fully inform them, creating also the basis for external communication. Internal communication should be encouraged and regulated by clear policies. Marketing is fundamental to deliver efficient messages raising public consciousness and commitment to the organization. Media relations are fundamental to attract stakeholders and raise funds for the organization.

In order to be efficient, communication has to be ethical, clear, frequent and related to the NPO's goals. Every non-profit organization should produce, on an annual basis, a financial report in order to be fully transparent with all the stakeholders of the NPO<sup>92</sup>.

- *To evaluate their performance.* Since NPOs are entities with a public interest and serving the public, they have to be evaluated by the public,

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<sup>92</sup> Michigan Nonprofit Association, *Principles and Practices Guide for Nonprofit Excellence in Michigan*, October 2009.

therefore NPOs should periodically measure their performance according to a clear set of goals<sup>93</sup>.

- *To manage their finances well and to fundraise.* For what concerns finances, NPOs have to adhere to the legal requirements and to use their finances to achieve their mission. Moreover, since non-profit organizations receive many philanthropic donations, they have the ethical obligation to ensure that these funds are transparently and properly used<sup>94</sup>.
- *To set specific governance policies.* Every non-profit board should set policies in order to regulate the organization's activity and to use adequately the resources to carry out the NPO's mission<sup>95</sup>.
- *To plan accurately the activities and the strategies.* The organization's decision-making process should be guided by clear strategic priorities set out by the NPO. It is fundamental to plan the activities to carry out in order to achieve those strategic priorities in the best way possible<sup>96</sup>.
- *To set out strategic alliances.* Those alliances can be established with many different entities and can serve many different purposes. Every NPO

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<sup>93</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>94</sup> Minnesota Council of Nonprofits, *Principles and Practices for Nonprofit Excellence*, 2014.

<sup>95</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>96</sup> Ibidem.

should be open to set strategic alliances in order to partner with other organizations to achieve the desired results<sup>97</sup>.

- *To use the appropriate information technology.* The appropriate technology is fundamental for NPOs to store data and to protect them, with the aim of achieving with efficiency and efficacy the organizational goals<sup>98</sup>.

Finally, two main elements on which NPOs have to focus to achieve excellence are teamwork and leadership. These two particular topics are accurately discussed in the following paragraphs.

### **3.2 TEAMWORK IN NPOs**

As in the other organizations, also in NPOs teams are the most common unit of work. Anyway, even if the indicators of team's success and the main principles of group effectiveness are valid for both companies and NPOs, there is a huge difference concerning the human resources who work in a for-profit and in a non-profit organization. As stated in paragraph 3.1.1, in fact, enterprises usually rely on a workforce which is entirely composed of paid employees who are

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<sup>97</sup> Michigan Nonprofit Association, *Principles and Practices Guide for Nonprofit Excellence in Michigan*, October 2009.

<sup>98</sup> Michigan Nonprofit Association, *Principles and Practices Guide for Nonprofit Excellence in Michigan*, October 2009.



contractually bound to the company. On the contrary, NPOs usually can rely on a few paid employees who are contractually bound to the organization and on a huge number of volunteers who voluntarily decide to work for the organization because they strongly believe in its mission and its values. The main characteristic of volunteering is that it is a practice that can be done by anyone, therefore in every organization there are volunteers of different ages, educational background and experience, working for a variety of personal motivations, ranging from the altruistic to the self-interested<sup>99</sup>. It is important to understand this variety of backgrounds and to provide all team members with the necessary means to set at the same knowledge level. Learning and training programs are suggested to help people acquire all the necessary competencies and capacities to work in the team effectively.

Another fundamental characteristic of volunteering is that every volunteer can contribute to the NPO's activities as much as he wants and for how long he wants. This characteristic translates in a high turnover who makes it more difficult to create and maintain stable teams. The short-term volunteer has usually a general interest in the organization and he is more likely to commit in well-defined jobs of limited duration because they are more focused on their "volunteering career" than in remaining in a specific organization. The long-term volunteer, on the contrary, is easily recruited because usually he is self-motivated and has a deeper

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<sup>99</sup> S. McCurley and R. Lynch, *Essential Volunteer Management*, VMSystems, 1989.

interest in the organization. This type of volunteer usually tends to be more “generalist” for what concerns the tasks to carry out in the NPO because he adapts his time and his energies to whatever it is necessary to make the cause succeed<sup>100</sup>. It is therefore fundamental to distinguish between the two types of volunteers when assigning the tasks in a work team.

Furthermore, sometimes it can be difficult for long-term volunteers to work with short-term ones because the lack of willingness of the short termers in giving the same amount of effort and time of long termers can be viewed with hostility<sup>101</sup>. It is hence critical to build the team in a way that allows and fosters cooperation and collaboration among team members. Team-building activities may help volunteers to perceive complementarity with their colleagues to increase team cohesion and to enhance performance<sup>102</sup>.

To conclude, an additional aspect to consider is that volunteers are always moved only by personal motivations and that they are not paid for the work they do. Hence, when forming a team in a NPO and assigning tasks to volunteers, it is essential to always remember and consider the voluntary base of their work since this may stand for longer deadlines and a limited availability<sup>103</sup>.

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<sup>100</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>101</sup> S. McCurley and R. Lynch, *Essential Volunteer Management*, VMSystems, 1989.

<sup>102</sup> F. J. Nave do Adro, J. C. Correia Leitao, *Leadership and organizational innovation in the third sector: a systematic literature review*, “International Journal of Innovation Studies”, 2020.

<sup>103</sup> S. McCurley and R. Lynch, *Essential Volunteer Management*, VMSystems, 1989.

### 3.3 LEADERSHIP IN NPOs

The third sector is facing an increased demand for services against reduced resources, which emphasises survival and resilience, making the role of leaders particularly important. One of the major problems that the third sector has to face is actually the “lack of leadership” because often people who have a leadership position in a NPO are not enough trained, educated and prepared to perform it in the most efficient way possible<sup>104</sup>.

Third sector leaders can use some practices and some leadership styles theories developed for for-profit scenarios, even though those leadership styles have to be adapted to the new economic environment<sup>105</sup>.

Joseph B. Holloway (2012) conducted a study which demonstrated that different leadership styles can create different organizational climates. In particular, Holloway proved that there is a significant positive relationship between relation-oriented leadership behaviours and the organizational climate dimensions of reward and warmth. This finding is particularly important since it implies that, in order to make people more committed to an organization, it is fundamental to develop strong interpersonal relationships<sup>106</sup>. Therefore, since in NPOs

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<sup>104</sup> J. Hodges and B. Howieson, *The challenges of leadership in the third sector*, “European Management Journal”, Vol. 35, pp. 69-77, 2017.

<sup>105</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>106</sup> J. B. Holloway, *Leadership Behavior and Organizational Climate: An Empirical Study in a Non-profit Organization*, “Emerging Leadership Journeys”, Regent University, 2012.

commitment for the organization and its mission are fundamental to engage volunteers, every relationship-oriented leadership style is advised in order to build strong bonds and enhance people's dedication. Among those, it is often used the transformational leadership style that, being a dynamic leadership style, helps leaders to increase their team member's commitment and to manage the team and the organization efficiently even in a dynamic and ever-changing environment, such as the third sector. Since it focuses more on ethics and doing the right thing, transformational leadership style is particularly successful in NPOs. Leaders are often seen as mentors or coaches, and their personal relationship with team members helps increasing their commitment to the organization, which is an approach from which any size of non-profit can benefit from<sup>107</sup>. Furthermore, transformational leaders in NPOs can raise awareness of the organization's moral standards, can use persuasive appeals, can create an ethical climate of shared values and can encourage followers to look beyond their self-interests, ensuring to the organization long-term volunteers, strong devotion to the mission and innovation, which translate in an effective performance<sup>108</sup>.

In general, regardless of the leadership style, some characteristics on which a NPO leader should focus more are:

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<sup>107</sup> L. Eisenstein, *How Can Transformational Leadership Impact Nonprofits of Any Size?*, Board Effect, 22 February 2021.

<sup>108</sup> Ibidem.

- *The external environment.* The third sector environment is more unpredictable than others, and it may oblige leaders to confront and face obstacles and challenges they would not have expected. For this reason, it is fundamental for NPO's leaders to always pay attention to the external environment and to adopt a more collaborative way of working across sectors<sup>109</sup>.
- *The critical thinking.* Since not all the practices applied in the private sector can be successfully used in the third sector, it is fundamental for leaders to use critical thinking in order to find out which practices are appropriate for a NPO and which ones must be avoided<sup>110</sup>.
- *The innovation.* Recent studies show that the third sector suffers from a lack of innovation, therefore leaders should be prepared to do whatever encourages, supports and provides innovation. In this sense, leadership can be critical to enhance innovation in the third sector<sup>111</sup>.
- *The ethical boundaries.* The third sector environment is quite complex and rapidly changing, providing different ethical challenges at which leaders have to be prepared to respond. Leaders have to ensure they use their position of power in an ethical manner, responding quickly to the new

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<sup>109</sup> J. Hodges and B. Howieson, *The challenges of leadership in the third sector*, "European Management Journal", Vol. 35, pp. 69-77, 2017.

<sup>110</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>111</sup> Ibidem.

situations and challenges, engaging in active dialogue with stakeholders, and taking full responsibility for their conduct<sup>112</sup>.

Starting from these fundamental characteristics, leaders have to develop their leadership styles focusing on relationships in order to help the organization achieve its mission.

### **3.4 PROJECT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN NPOs**

Since the majority of NPOs tend to achieve their mission by implementing field-related projects, project management is usually one of the most important and diffused disciplines in third sector organizations. Anyway, a lack of resources and experience often leaves NPOs without a framework to effectively implement project management within their unique context. This unpreparedness can lead to take ineffective steps which the organization is not yet prepared for and to a waste in time and money, that is why it is particularly important for non-profit organizations to take time to carefully assess their project management practices and performance<sup>113</sup>.

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<sup>112</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>113</sup> K. Anderson and J. Lannon, *Project Management Performance Assessment in the Non-Profit Sector*, "Project Management Research and Practice", Vol.5, 2018.

In general, the five main steps when planning and managing a project in a NPO are writing a project proposal, fundraising, executing the project, monitoring and controlling the project and closing the project<sup>114</sup>.

In order to lead projects successfully, leaders have to focus on three main criteria:

- Project management should be considered along with other external parameters and long-term goals.
- The client should be actively involved in the planning and production phase of the project.
- The project leader always has to choose the best leadership style according to the type of project.

If these three criteria are respected, project's success in terms of goals' achievement, time, quality and cost, will be easier to pursuit<sup>115</sup>.

The effectiveness of project management in a NPO can be measured by looking at improvements in some managerial areas such as accountability, capacity,

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<sup>114</sup> F. Martins Lacerda, C. Dai Prá Martens, H. M. Rodrigues de Freitas, *A Project Portfolio Management model adapted to non-profit organizations*, "Project Management Research and Practice", Vol.3, July – December 2016.

<sup>115</sup> M. I. Montes-Guerra, A. R. De-Miguel, M. A. Pérez-Ezcurdia, F. N. Gimena Ramos and H. M. Díez-Silva, *Project Management in Development Cooperation. Non-Governmental Organizations*, "Revista de ciencias administrativas y sociales", Vol. 25, No. 56, pp. 53-67, April - June 2015.

effectiveness, efficiency, quality and, above all, stakeholders' satisfaction<sup>116</sup> and by using different tools, such as:

- *Quality Management Systems (QMSs)*, which are a number of processes aimed at delivering the right value proposition to stakeholders that can allow the organization to do a self-assessment and to understand what are its strengths that need to be recognized and maintained, and what are its weaknesses that need to be improved<sup>117</sup>.
- *Logic models*, which are based on meeting accountability requirements while reflecting on measurement outcomes, fostering continuous improvement<sup>118</sup>.
- *Best practice benchmarking*, which consists in comparing the practices of its own organization with those of other successful organizations of the same sector in order to improve performance<sup>119</sup>.
- *Kaplan's (2001) balanced scorecard*, which consists in measuring NPO's performance in areas such as value, learning and growth<sup>120</sup>.

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<sup>116</sup> K. Anderson and J. Lannon, *Project Management Performance Assessment in the Non-Profit Sector*, "Project Management Research and Practice", Vol.5, 2018.

<sup>117</sup> K. Anderson and J. Lannon, *Project Management Performance Assessment in the Non-Profit Sector*, "Project Management Research and Practice", Vol.5, 2018.

<sup>118</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>119</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>120</sup> Ibidem.



- *The performance prism*, which consists in drawing a comprehensive, multi-dimensional and balanced overview of the organization's performance regarding the stakeholders' satisfaction, the organization's capabilities and strategies, the stakeholders' contribution, and the organization's processes<sup>121</sup>.
- *The Practical Quality Assurance System for Small Organisations (PQASSO)*, which is a popular quality measurement system in UK for organizations of the third sector<sup>122</sup>.

The above-mentioned performance measurement tools can be very useful to identify the strengths and the weaknesses of every organization's project management practice.

Finally, due to the fact that non-profit organizations have to fundraise and to sign agreements with partners and investors, it is also fundamental for the organization to make a selection and to choose carefully which projects to perform. It is essential to choose projects whose realization is consistent with the available resources<sup>123</sup>.

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<sup>121</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>122</sup> K. Anderson and J. Lannon, *Project Management Performance Assessment in the Non-Profit Sector*, "Project Management Research and Practice", Vol.5, 2018.

<sup>123</sup> F. Martins Lacerda, C. Dai Prá Martens, H. M. Rodrigues de Freitas, *A Project Portfolio Management model adapted to non-profit organizations*, "Project Management Research and Practice", Vol.3, July – December 2016.

Moreover, projects have to be classified according to their relevance to the business, so that, when it comes to choose, it will be easier to do a selection and to find the best ones for pursuing the NPO's mission. Projects' evaluation techniques depend on the needs of the organization, but in general both qualitative and quantitative criteria of analysis are advised<sup>124</sup>. Also, projects have also to be compared with each other in order to define their priority according to their importance and their strategic contribution<sup>125</sup>. By choosing the right projects to perform and implementing the right project management evaluation criteria, NPOs are able to maximize their performance and achieve their mission in the best way possible.

### **3.5 COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND THE THIRD SECTOR**

#### 3.5.1 The impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the third sector

Covid-19 pandemic had a huge impact on the entire European society, touching many sensible areas such as science, medicine, economy, politics, law, and public and social organization and arising many challenges that cannot be enclosed into finite pre-defined interpretations.

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<sup>124</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>125</sup> F. Martins Lacerda, C. Dai Prá Martens, H. M. Rodrigues de Freitas, *A Project Portfolio Management model adapted to non-profit organizations*, "Project Management Research and Practice", Vol.3, July – December 2016.

In this multidimensional framework, the volunteering sector found himself to play the part of a main character, showing the essential role of NPOs when it comes to help the society and overcome crisis<sup>126</sup>.

For what concerns the economic impact that SARS-COV-2 epidemic had in the third sector, it is important to do an analysis taking into account the advocacy element, since every NPO operates only in accordance with its social mission. Anyway, since Covid-19 pandemic impacted on many different social areas, almost all the NPOs were called into action to help people overcoming some issues related to the sanitary crisis. At the beginning, almost all NPOs, as every other for-profit organization, suffered from financial liquidity shortage, difficulties in managing projects, difficulties in fundraising, and organizational and structural shock<sup>127</sup>. Anyway, in the long term, NPOs suffered also from other difficulties that were not experienced by the for-profit sector such as, for example, the lack of human resources due to a decrease in the number of volunteers.

At a later stage, different categories of NPOs experienced very different situations: some sectors such as the cultural and the sportive one experienced a deep crisis due to the shortage of funds and the partial inability to fundraise because of the closure of cinemas, museums, sports facilities, etc., while other

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<sup>126</sup> I. Psaroudakis, Covid-19 e Terzo settore: uno sguardo in profondità, Centro di Ricerca Maria Eletta Martini, 2021.

<sup>127</sup> I. Psaroudakis, Covid-19 e Terzo settore: uno sguardo in profondità, Centro di Ricerca Maria Eletta Martini, 2021.

sectors experienced an anomalous growth due to an increase in private donations and in volunteers generated by the widespread need of fighting the crisis<sup>128</sup>. This difference shows a particular characteristic of the third sector: since people are more likely to donate to charities to support humanitarian and social missions in periods of emergency and need, in 2020 and in 2021 some branches of the third sector were even able to grow and to work more thanks to the global sanitary crisis<sup>129</sup>.

Anyway, regardless of the final outcome generated by the pandemic, at the beginning every single NPO had to face the challenges brought by the new environment, which obliged many people to work from home and many organizations to adapt to remote working.

### 3.5.2 NPOs and the shift to international virtual teams

As every other organization, NPOs had to face the obligation to maintain social distance because of Covid-19 pandemic, hence they had to adapt to the new situation and to transform their physical teams into virtual ones. Employees and volunteers of non-profits had to find a work-life balance, while facing emotional stress and fear because of the world's sanitary situation. Both leaders and team

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<sup>128</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>129</sup> I. Psaroudakis, Covid-19 e Terzo settore: uno sguardo in profondità, Centro di Ricerca Maria Eletta Martini, 2021.

members had to find new ways of working together, forming team's trust, cooperating and coordinating, creating a safe environment and interacting with their colleagues. Some volunteers had even to experience an increase in tasks to carry out related to the higher amount of work that some NPOs had to face.

Besides all the aspects of virtual teamwork already mentioned in paragraph 1.3.3 which are common for both for-profit and non-profit organizations, it is particularly interesting to mention the phenomenon of international virtual teams. Many non-profit organizations which operate in more than one Country, taking advantage of the new virtual reality and of the lack of physical boundaries, started forming international teams in order to maximize team's skills and capabilities. International virtual teams have many advantages because they can be composed by people coming from all over the world, ensuring to the organization the possibility to choose among a wider pool of applicants in order to select the best people possible and to form more performant and effective teams. Anyway, there are some challenges that international virtual teams may face, such as timing and cultural differences<sup>130</sup>.

For what concerns timing problems, it often happens that team members live in different time zones, therefore it is important to accurately schedule meetings in

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<sup>130</sup> S. Van Ryssen and S. Hayes Godar, *Going international without going international: multinational virtual teams*, "Journal of International Management", Vol. 6, Issue 1, pp. 49-60, 2000.

order to find a timetable that works for everybody. Another main difficulty derives from the fact that people coming from all over the world do not share the same language and the same culture, which can create misunderstanding and disorientation among team members. It is essential to create a climate of trust and to implement successful intercultural communication by, for example, discussing the difference in task orientation in order to achieve a general understanding of work norms and behaviours<sup>131</sup>.

Overcoming those difficulties may be challenging, but international virtual teams can be the ace in the hole for non-profits who want to maximize their performance and to fulfil their organizational goals.

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<sup>131</sup> S. Van Ryssen and S. Hayes Godar, *Going international without going international: multinational virtual teams*, "Journal of International Management", Vol. 6, Issue 1, pp. 49-60, 2000.

## CHAPTER IV

### KING BAUDOUIN FOUNDATION CASE STUDY

#### INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapters, we analysed the main issues that organizations have to face when it comes to leadership and teamwork in project management, with a particular attention to the organizational shock caused by Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. To study this phenomenon, we focused on the third sector which was significantly affected by the consequences brought by the SARS-COV-2 epidemic and which responded in a unique and singular way compared to the other economic sectors.

In order to understand how non-profit organizations actually reacted to the crisis and which ones of the theoretical principles were indeed applied, I decided to conduct an empirical research on the King Baudouin Foundation (KBF), which is the biggest Foundations of Belgium in terms of credit, income and disbursement<sup>132</sup> and which hence constitutes an evidential and interesting study case. Also, it is relevant to mention that KBF provides relevant information on project management since its work is structured in projects through which the Foundation intends to achieve the organization's mission.

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<sup>132</sup> F. Lampaert, B. Duvieusart, C. Gijssels and E. Franchois, *Les Fondations en Belgique – Profil du Secteur*, Fondation Roi Baudouin, 2008.

The present research on KBF had a twofold aim: on one side understanding whether there were difficulties experienced by working teams and to which extent the NPO's projects were affected by Covid-19, and on the other side determining which were the challenges experienced by KBF's leaders and how they adapted their leadership style to the new virtual and contingency environment.

In the next paragraphs, I am going to describe the main activities of the King Baudouin Foundation, to outline the methodology applied for this research and to present the main results.

## **4.1 THE KING BAUDOUIN FOUNDATION**

### 4.1.1 KBF: History and activity description

The King Baudouin Foundation is the largest public benefit Foundation of Belgium<sup>133</sup>. Even if it works for public interests, it is a private Foundation with an independent management and its own capital.

The foundation was created in 1976 to mark the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of King Baudouin's reign in Belgium. On that occasion, some private companies decided to create the Foundation putting in a small amount of capital in order to let it start, with the mission of "*working together for a better society*"<sup>134</sup>. Soon, KBF found new sources of funds and grew becoming an actor for change and innovation in

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<sup>133</sup> *La via belga alla filantropia*, Vita, 3rd March 2019.

<sup>134</sup> King Baudouin Foundation's website.



Belgium and Europe, with the aim of serving the public interest and the social cohesion through the promotion of an efficient philanthropy of private individuals and companies all over the world. In particular, the King Baudouin Foundation fosters the values of integrity and transparency, promotion of solidarity, respect for diversity, and pluralism and independence<sup>135</sup>.

The peculiarity of the King Baudouin Foundation is that it works through a multi-level and combined action that includes:

- *financial support*, using part of its capital to invest in projects that have a social impact;
- *promotion of philanthropy*, encouraging individuals and businesses who want to build a better world;
- *advocacy and citizen mobilisation*, raising awareness among policy makers and citizens about the challenges that society has to face.
- *bring people together*, putting together all the stakeholders concerned about the same issue in order to raise awareness about that issue;
- *research*, collecting fact and figures concerning particular societal problems, to spread knowledge about them;
- *events*, organizing debates, seminars and study days on societal themes;
- *partnerships and missions*, working at collaborations with both private and public sectors.

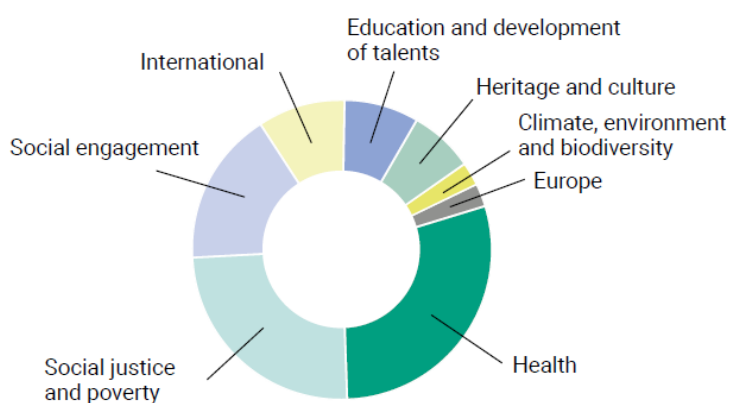
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<sup>135</sup> The King Baudouin Foundation's website.

With its action, the King Baudouin Foundation is actually supporting 129 Countries all over the world.

In terms of governance, KBF has a Board of Directors composed of 12 members and whose head is Luc Tayart de Borms, an Advisory Board composed by 25 members, a managing Director who works with five directors and a staff of 91 full-time equivalents, a Financial Committee, an Audit Committee, a Nomination Committee and the Censors.

In terms of activities and finances, in 2020 the King Baudouin Foundation provided support for €96,320,573.00, helping 685 individuals and 3,873 organizations. With these funds, the Foundation financed 178 calls for projects, 58 publications and 208,467 donations to third party projects supporting various causes as in figure IV.1<sup>136</sup>.



*Figure IV.1 – Areas of KBF's support in 2020 (KBF's website).*

<sup>136</sup> The King Baudouin Foundation's website, *Snapshot 2020*, March 2021.

#### 4.1.2 The King Baudouin Foundation and Covid-19 pandemic

When Covid-19 pandemic spread in 2020, the King Baudouin Foundation promptly mobilised its resources to help the society overcome the Coronavirus crisis and to support the wave of solidarity in Belgium, Europe and internationally. In particular, the Foundation opened two emergency calls for funds and raised €8,000,000 that were later distributed to 500 organizations fighting poverty and 300 front line organizations. Other donations supported dozens of projects aimed at helping care institutions, for a total amount of €2.250.000<sup>137</sup>.

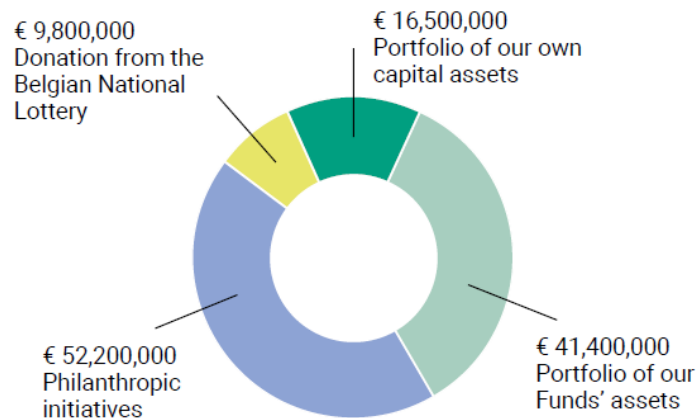
Furthermore, the King Baudouin Foundation collaborated with the EU Staff Covid-19 Solidarity Response Fund to raise funds and provide aid to the European communities most impacted by the pandemic. Finally, KBFUS, KBF Canada and Transnational giving Europe facilitated the collection of millions of euros across the EU, while the European Programme for Integration and Migration (EPIM), of which KBF is a founding member, gave grants to civil society organizations and supported migrants in Europe<sup>138</sup>.

It is therefore evident that, because of Coronavirus, KBF experienced an increase in funds and donations going from a budget of €66,151,801 in 2019 to a budget of around €120,000,000 in 2021 (figure IV.2).

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<sup>137</sup> The King Baudouin Foundation's website, *Snapshot 2020*, March 2021.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibidem*.



*Figure IV.2 – Sources and amounts of KBF's funds in 2021 (KBF's website).*

#### **4.2 METHODOLOGY**

The present research was born from a collaboration with the ICHEC Management School of Brussels in which I spent an exchange mobility period during my Master degree studies, and where I first came in contact with the King Baudouin Foundation.

I firstly contacted Jérémie Leroy, the Financial Director of the Foundation, sending him an email on the 12<sup>nd</sup> of April 2021 explaining the aims and the methodology of my research and asking for their contribution. The Foundation agreed to participate in the research on the 19<sup>th</sup> of April 2021 and I sent an online quantitative questionnaire to their employees and volunteers on the 20<sup>th</sup> of May 2021. The questionnaire was divided into three different sections: the first one aimed at collecting general data to cluster the final results, the second part aiming

at understanding if team members experienced some difficulties in working in teams because of Covid-19, and the third section aimed at determining which were employees and volunteers' general thoughts and feelings related to the pandemic and to virtual teamworking. In total, the questionnaire was composed of 30 questions.

21 people actively working for the King Baudouin Foundation answered the questionnaire in the period included between May and September 2021. These 21 people constitute a diversified sample of analysis, since they have different profiles and different experiences in the Foundation. Among the participants at the survey, 75% are women while 25% are men. Among them, 87.5% are full-time employees while the other 12.5% are part-time employees. No volunteers answered to the questionnaire, anyway information on volunteers' situation was collected lately thanks to interviews to project leaders.

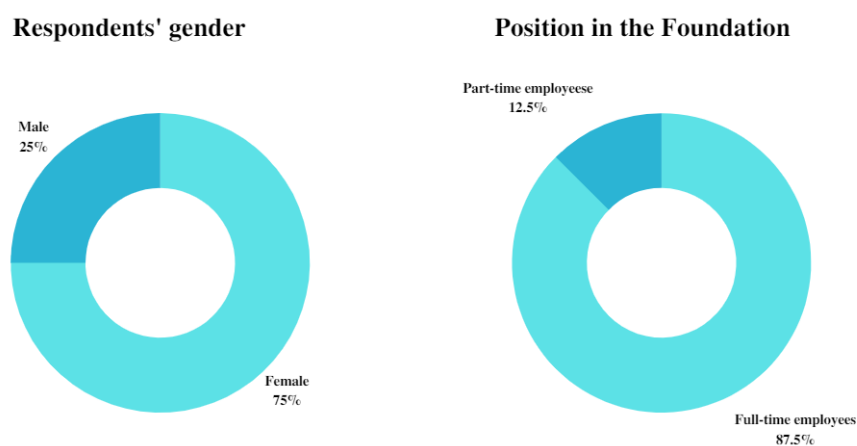


Figure IV.3 – Questionnaire answers (1)

The respondents represent all tranches of ages, from 20 to 65 years. For what concerns their experience at the King Baudouin Foundation, 50% declared that they have been working for the Foundation for more than 1 but less than 5 years, 25% that they have been working for KBF for more than 15 years, 12.5% that they have been working for the organization in a period comprised between 10 and 15 years, 6.3% declared that they have been working for the Foundation for less than 1 year, while the last 6.3% reported that they have been working for KBF for more than 5 but less than 10 years. Finally, nearly 60% of the interviewees are team members, while 40% of them are project managers. Thereby, the data collected come from a sample that is representative of the entire human capital of the organization, giving an overview of all the challenges that the King Baudouin Foundation had to face because of Covid-19 pandemic.

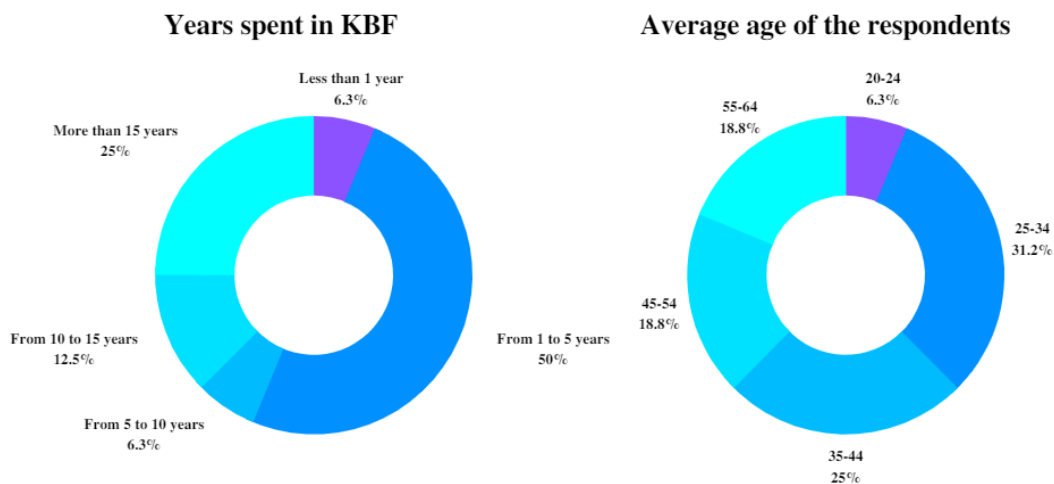


Figure IV.4 – Questionnaire answers (2)

Moreover, between the 29<sup>th</sup> of June and the 10<sup>th</sup> of July, I also conducted some qualitative interviews with 6 projects' team leaders of King Baudouin Foundation. The interview was structured around 15 open questions aimed at understanding how leaders perceived the shift into virtual teams and what leadership style they used to manage their teams and projects during Covid-19 pandemic. The average duration of each interview is 25 minutes. All the interviews were registered and then transcribed to take useful information for this research.

Every data collected has been stored and treated according to the GDPR regulation.

All the data were compared to the theoretical information outlined in the first three chapters in order to understand to which extent the King Baudouin Foundation was impacted by Covid-19 pandemic and how its leaders and its teams reacted to an unprecedented and unforeseen crisis as the SARS-COV-2 epidemic.

All the results of the research are presented in the following paragraph.

## **4.3 RESULTS**

### **4.3.1 Covid-19 and teamwork in KBF**

For what concerns teamwork in the King Baudouin Foundation, I cross-checked the results of the quantitative questionnaire administered to the Foundation with the main theoretical principles of both the first and the third chapter.

First of all, in order to have an overview of the overall situation, I focused on understanding to which extent KBF was affected by Covid-19 pandemic.

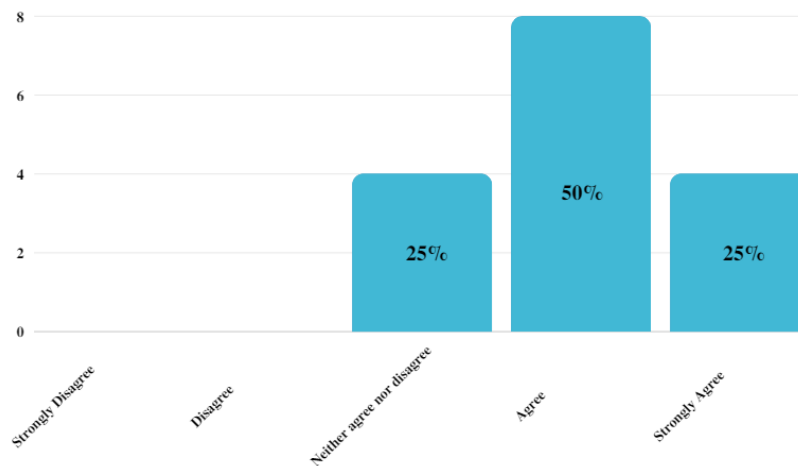
Like the other organizations of the third sector, when Covid-19 pandemic spread, the King Baudouin Foundation had to suspend its activities in presence and started working remotely. In fact, according to the answers of the respondents, before Covid-19 pandemic more than 70% of the Foundation's projects were realised by teams working in presence or in a hybrid mode (with face-to-face meetings combined to some occasional online meetings or interactions).

Then, in March 2020, many teams had to shift to remote work, with about 60% of the teams working only from home, 30% of the teams working in a hybrid mode and only 10% of the teams working fully in presence. It is therefore evident that the King Baudouin Foundation was structurally affected by the SARS-COV-2 epidemic, in fact, 75% of the participants to the questionnaire stated that the project they were working on experienced some organizational changes due to the pandemic.

In particular, the majority of KBF's employees stated that they experienced changes in the operational objectives of the project that had been modified to readapt to the new environmental and legal conditions established by Covid-19.



**"Covid-19 pandemic has brought some organizational changes on the project"**



*Figure IV.5 – Questionnaire answers (3)*

Furthermore, almost all the respondents declared that some phases of the projects they were working on were delayed because of the pandemic, while almost 40% of them affirmed that the entire accomplishment of the project was delayed compared to the original deadline. Also, almost 40% of the participants stated that, because of the SARS-COV-2 epidemic, they also experienced a change in the financial budget of the project they were managing.

Noted that KBF's activities and projects were definitely impacted by the pandemic, I then focused on understanding which practices of team designing and team effectiveness were actually applied by the Foundation.

Indeed, even if the above-mentioned results showed that some KBF's teams experienced difficulties in carrying out their projects during the pandemic, this does not mean that they were not effective. In fact, according to the answers to the

questionnaire and of the interviews, the output of each project was in line with the original objectives and the expected performance standards of that project. Furthermore, the members of the team found a new way of working together and communicating, showed by the fact that 80% of the respondents declared that they would not describe their first approach to remote work as complicated, and about 93% of the interviewees said that they did not feel disoriented when they had to shift from face-to-face to virtual teamwork. Moreover, 87% of KBF's employees who completed the questionnaire affirmed that they easily adapted to work from home and in virtual teams, and 97% of them declared not to feel emotionally stressed because of it.

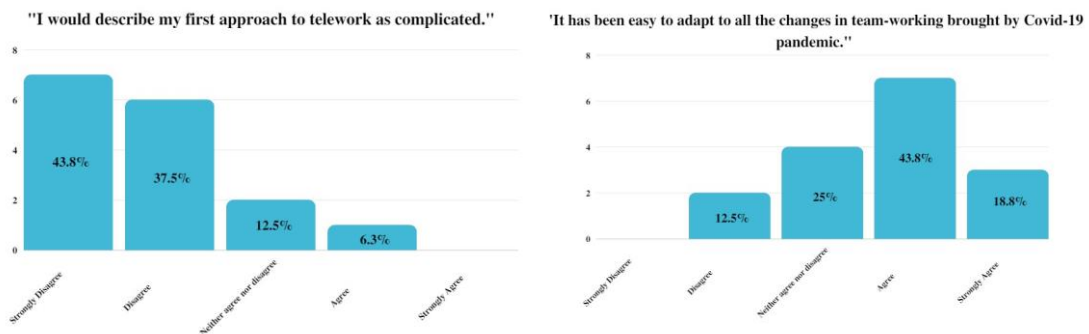


Figure VI.6 – Questionnaire answers (4)

This happened because KBF already used some virtual tools to carry out some work since they had to manage and coordinate with international committees of volunteers, therefore it was easier for team members to access the right tools to

create a safe and excellent environment for the development of team's relationships.

Finally, all the team members stated that, on average, they were satisfied with the way their virtual teams worked and were managed.

Therefore, all the three criteria of effectiveness designed by Hackman were met.

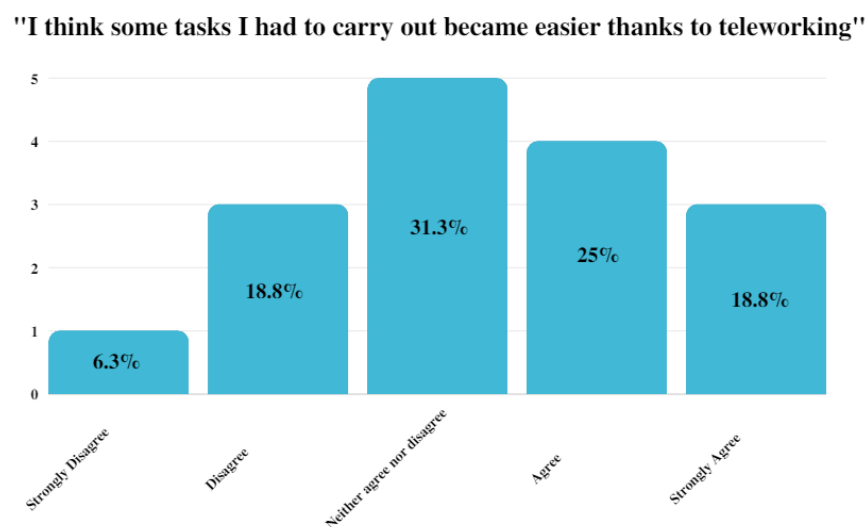
For what concerns Hackman's normative model of team's effectiveness, it is also interesting to see that the three main classes of variables of the model are respected by the Foundation's project teams. In particular, for what concerns the design of the groups, leaders in the interviews have stated that their groups were highly motivated in achieving their tasks and that all the members were committed in doing their tasks, minimizing "social loafing". Also, all team members in KBF are usually experts in one field of competence, so the tasks were all assigned according to the task relevant-expertise of each team member.

Furthermore, leaders stated that they focused on giving the teams intrinsic rewards because the best reward for people working in an NPO is personal fulfilment and the sentiment of "helping other people". Also, employees and volunteers' training and education was one main priority of the Foundation, in fact, during Covid-19 pandemic all the team members were trained at using the new technological tools. This shows that also the principle of the organizational context of the group was respected.

Finally, results also show that the teams were able to work together and to coordinate, minimizing group process losses and thus respecting also the principle of group synergy.

The previous results are quite peculiar also because they show that, because KBF had already available some teleworking tools before the pandemic occurred and because it adopted the right teamwork techniques, then it was easier for it and for its volunteers and employees to adapt to all the changes brought by the Covid-19 epidemic.

Indeed, almost 43% of the participants in the survey declared that some tasks become even easier thanks to teleworking, inverting the general trend and transforming the process losses into process gains, as depicted in paragraph 1.3.3.



*Figure VI.7 – Questionnaire answers (5)*

In particular, some employees pointed out the fact that they received adequate and complete training of virtual tools from the organization, therefore they could adapt easily to virtual teamwork and benefit from all the advantages brought by it, such as time flexibility, an easier work-life balance and a quieter workplace.

Found that KBF succeeded in carrying out its projects because its teams applied Hackman's principles, then I focused on understanding which were the main issues experienced by the organization in virtual teamwork. Theoretical findings from the previous chapters highlight the fact that virtual teams are often less productive than face-to-face ones. Anyway, the results of the questionnaire show, as mentioned above, that KBF's employees and volunteers adapted easily to teamwork and succeeded in carrying out their tasks successfully. This is also because of a fundamental characteristic of volunteers of NPOs: since they are moved from an intrinsic motivation, they are able to put more effort in the tasks they carry out, to better manage their emotional stress and to even work more if it is necessary to achieve the organizational goals. In fact, King Baudouin Foundation's leaders stated that the Foundation had to face an increase in the amount of work to carry out because of the emergency interventions put into action to face the Covid-19 pandemic and 85% of the respondents to the questionnaire also declared they worked more than usual when the shift to virtual teamwork occurred, profiting of their working-time flexibility to carry out the higher amount of work possible. Anyway, all team leaders confirmed that their

teams reacted incredibly well to this situation because they wanted to contribute to their humanitarian causes, and they were moved by their belief in the mission of the organization. *“We knew we were helping people and we were handling the crisis well. This was sufficient to know we could do it”* stated one project leader.

This is the incredible strength of non-profit organizations that were able to react to the Covid-19 emergency building resilient virtual teams who succeeded in facing adversity. According to what leaders stated in the interviews, this resilience lies in the fact that team members believed in their capability of facing the emergency and achieving the results, knew exactly what was expected from them, adapted quickly to the new environment, and operated in a safe environment. Therefore, all the resources of virtual team’s resilience (virtual team potency, virtual team mental model of teamwork, virtual team’s capability of improvise and virtual team’s psychological safety) were possessed by KBF’s project teams, allowing them to effectively respond to the emergency.

#### 4.3.2 Covid-19 and leadership in KBF

For what concerns leadership, I first focused on understanding what were the major changes experienced by project leaders.

Six team leaders of the King Baudouin Foundation have been interviewed in order to understand how virtual teams were managed during Covid-19 pandemic.

All the leaders testified that, before Covid-19 pandemic, the majority of the Foundation's work was carried out in a unique building in Brussels, with people of the same team usually working in the same office. This allowed them to share easily data and useful information, to help each other when necessary, to nourish team trust through a series of team building activities and of small talks during breaks, and to create a warm and safe work environment. At the beginning of March 2020, they were obliged to start working from home because of the pandemic and all their employees and volunteers reacted in different ways, which requested to leaders a high level of sensitivity to understand how to meet all the different employee's needs and enable the team to build team trust and team efficiency.

I therefore focused on understanding which key leadership characteristics and which leadership style were necessary to lead successfully virtual teams into the new environment.

First of all, respondents showed they carried out the three main roles of project leaders: at the beginning of the group's work, they all defined the task clearly, then they focused on achieving the tasks and on maintaining effective relationships among team members, even when they were obliged to shift to virtual teamwork.

Moreover, leaders confirmed the results of the questionnaire, stating that for the majority of the employees it was not difficult to use the new technological tools

(Microsoft Teams in most cases) and to find a new work-life balance. Anyway, project managers also claimed that there was a minority that suffered for the new situation because they were scared for their personal health threatened by the pandemic and because they had to carry out a higher amount of work. The leaders focused on these people, trying to find a way to rebuild their personal safety and, consequently, the team's safety. They tried to give more space to people who were more mentally affected by the situation, understanding their difficulties and fears and trying to help solving them. Focusing on their team members' needs and on the way they felt, KBF's project leaders showed to have one of the main key competences of leaders: emotional intelligence. Through emotional intelligence they were then able to build stronger relationships and a cooperative team.

Also, KBF was very sensitive to these issues and incentivized people to stay home if they did not feel safe. If in particular circumstances the employees were needed in the physical office, the Foundation paid for private means of transports in order to let them feel free.

Furthermore, all the leaders stated that they have suffered from a loss in personal communication, losing track of their employees' personal lives and, sometimes, also of basic human contacts. In fact, most of the virtual meetings held were faster and more structured than physical ones, with no space for small talks and personal interactions. Some people did not turn on their webcams during the meetings, lowering even more the degree of personal interactions and body language.



*“I could check if they were carrying out their tasks or if they were doing it in time, but I could not check on their well-being. Sometimes it was difficult to say if someone was struggling or not, and even if he was, it was difficult to find the right way of saying something and help him. For some people it was just too personal”* stated a team leader.

To overcome these difficulties, project leaders tried to be creative and to find new ways of communicating. Many of them encouraged open communication during meetings and tried to devote the very first minutes of each reunion to some personal conversation, in order to establish a deeper connection and a relaxed environment. Other leaders, in spite of the increase in work to carry out, did not renounce team building moments and organized some online coffee breaks or online birthday parties to remind everyone that they were still a team, despite distance. It is therefore evident that KBF’s leaders focused on core and managerial communication to enhance team’s trust and create a safe environment. They did not focus on corporate communication because it was not inherent to the management of the single virtual team.

These techniques helped leaders to keep the motivation high, practice they achieved by trying to figure out people’s needs and meeting them with intrinsic rewards such as personal fulfilment. At a certain point, some of them may have been tired of working from home, but their willingness of coming back to work in

presence is, according to leaders, the clear sign that their motivation and engagement in the organization has always remained high.

By enhancing communication and motivation, leaders showed to possess the other two key competences of successful project leaders.

In September 2020, KBF also conducted a research among its employees and volunteers to understand if their motivation remained high during Covid-19 pandemic and the results confirmed the assumptions above. The Foundation is also willing to continue the research, doing another survey after the end of the emergency, to collect what people have learned during the pandemic and transform it into organizational knowledge to guard against future crises. This is another sign of the dedication of KBF on its employees and volunteers and of its attitude towards resiliency.

Finally, another main issue that drew the attention of project leaders was the arrival of new employees and volunteers during the pandemic and their integration into virtual teams. Many leaders pointed out the fact that, for these newcomers, it was particularly difficult to figure out a new job and a new working environment without directly experiencing it. Therefore, leaders encouraged the newcomers to present themselves when first joining the team, to ask questions to other team members and to take part in small talks. They also checked regularly with them and with their team members to make sure their integration process proceeded well. In this way, leaders noticed that the new employees succeeded in

adapting to their new teams, even if it was more difficult for them to feel part of the organization since there were not many possibilities of entering in contact with people of different teams. By doing this, KBF's leaders applied also the theoretical techniques regarding the inclusion of a new member into the team, since they gave the right attention to this issue, ensuring that the newcomer fitted the team and absorbed its norms.

In conclusion, since leaders focused on trying to understand what the personal issues related to Covid-19 were, on keeping motivation high and on developing a new system of right behaviours to adopt, we can state that they were all adopting a transformational leadership style. During Covid-19 pandemic, in fact, KBF's leaders focused on the building of personal relationships among team members and on fostering their development more than on validating the relationship between performance and reward, on following a designed path to achieve goals or on focusing on one thing at a time. Therefore, it is evident that they applied a transformational leadership style more than, for example, a transactional leadership style, a path-goal leadership style or an action centred leadership style.

#### **4.4 CONCLUSIONS**

The research conducted on the King Baudouin Foundation provides empirical proofs of the fact that, by applying the right teamwork techniques and the right

leadership style, it has been possible for project teams to face the emergency resulting from the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In fact, for what concerns teamwork, KBF applied Hackman's normative model and Hackman's principles of team effectiveness, and therefore succeeded in building effective teams to overcome the difficulties linked to the pandemic. Then, it also showed us that it is possible for project teams to reduce the impact of an unexpected event if there are some preconditions enabling it to face the crisis. In this particular context, it has been easier for an organization already used to virtual tools to shift to remote work because of the high degree of employee's digitalization, abolishing one of the main barriers related to virtual teamwork.

All these characteristics, along with resilience, are fundamental to build effective virtual teams during Covid-19 pandemic.

For what concerns leadership, to succeed during the pandemic, it is fundamental for leaders to continue carrying out their three major roles, employing also their key fundamental leadership characteristics. In particular, since in 2020 teams experienced an unusual and peculiar situation, leaders had to be sensitive and employ emotional intelligence, to boost communication in every way possible and to find the right ways of motivating their employees as KBF did. All those characteristics lead us to identify the best leadership style according to the Covid-19 situation, which is transformational leadership style.

Applying all those concepts, virtual teams are able to transform process losses into process gains achieving bigger results.

Finally, another important finding from this research is that the peculiar high commitment to the mission characterizing every non-profit organization can help volunteers and employees to overcome difficult moments and to even work more if it is necessary to help more people and achieve the organization's aims. This is also an important factor to consider for NPOs when aiming to project teams' success.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The main aim of this research was to understand how Covid-19 pandemic affected leadership and teamwork processes in project management and whether project teams and project leaders could react to it. Furthermore, the focus was on non-profit organizations to understand if they reacted differently from private companies, therefore all the conclusions presented below are in relation to the third sector.

According to the results obtained, for what concerns teamwork, it is possible to follow some criteria of effectiveness and a normative model to ensure virtual teams' success. Anyway, it is evident that Covid-19 pandemic created a structural shock in working teams since people were obliged to work remotely and to find new ways of building relationships and communicating. Virtual teams can react to it by continuing to apply the principles of teams' effectiveness and by finding new ways of interacting. Also, if they already have some tools and knowledge to fight the crisis, it is easier for them to adapt to the new environment and to achieve the expected results.

Moreover, another fundamental characteristic for virtual teams to succeed is to be resilient in order to face adversity and transform process gains into process losses.

Finally, the high commitment of NPOs' employees and volunteers generates, by nature, a higher motivation that helps team members overcome difficulties to achieve the organization's aims.

All these characteristics can help a project team to work more effectively.

For what concerns leadership, the main findings show that there is not a best leadership style, but that any style can be efficient if applied to the right situation.

In line with this statement, considering the situation of a non-profit organization during Covid-19 pandemic, the most efficient leadership style for projects' teams is the transformational leadership style since it allows leaders to create strong personal relationships and new paradigms of communication to ensure team's effectiveness.

Also, all leaders, regardless of the leadership style they use, should have some key leadership characteristics as emotional intelligence and the ability of enhancing communication and motivation among the team members. During the SARS-COV-2 epidemic, leaders had to manage virtual teams who were moving for the first time into a new environment, therefore those characteristics have been fundamental for them to build resilient teams able to face the adversities and to achieve the expected results by the pre-defined deadlines.

To conclude, it is evident that both leaders and team members faced difficulties and challenges during the shift from face-to-face to virtual teams, and that they had to find new ways of coordinating and cooperating to achieve the expected

results. Anyway, according to the findings, it is definitely possible for organizations and project teams to manage an unexpected and unpredictable crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic and to transform process losses into process gains by focusing on implementing the right leadership and teamwork dynamics.



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## **ANNEX II: MATERIALS FOR EMPIRICAL RESEARCH**

### **Material 1: Quantitative questionnaire administered to the King Baudouin Foundation**

#### **The impact of Covid-19 pandemic on project management | L'impact de la pandémie de Covid-19 sur le management des projets**

ENG: Covid-19 pandemic has affected the way of managing working teams and their projects by non-profit organizations.

This research is conducted in collaboration with the Italian "Politecnica delle Marche" University and the Belgian "ICHEC Brussels Management School" University, and it aims at analyzing how the Covid-19 pandemic has affected teamwork and project management in the non-profit sector.

Thank you for participating in this academic research. The survey should take only around 9 minutes of your time and your input will make a great contribution to the analysis. Thank you!

FR : La pandémie de Covid-19 a changé la manière de laquelle les ONG gèrent leurs équipes de travail et leurs projets.

Le but de cette recherche, née d'une collaboration entre l'Université italienne "Politecnica delle Marche" et l'Université belge "ICHEC Brussels Management School", est celui d'analyser comment la pandémie de Covid-19 a affecté le travail en équipe et le management des projets dans le secteur tertiaire.

Nous vous remercions beaucoup pour votre participation à cette recherche académique. Le sondage ne devrait prendre que 9 minutes de votre temps et votre apport sera une contribution importante pour cette étude. Merci beaucoup !

#### **Personal Data | Informations Personnelles**

##### **1. How old are you? | Quelle age avez-vous ?**

- 20-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65+

**2. What is your gender? | Quel est votre genre ?**

- Female / Femme
- Male / Homme
- Other / Autre

**3. Since when are you a member of King Baudouin Foundation? | Depuis combien de temps vous faites partie de la Fondation Roi Baudouin ?**

- Less than 1 year / Moins de 1 an
- From 1 to 5 years / Entre 1 et 5 ans
- From 5 to 10 years / Entre 5 et 10 ans
- From 10 to 15 years / Entre 10 et 15 ans
- More than 15 years / Plus de 15 ans

**4. What kind of position do you hold in King Baudouin Foundation? | Quel type de position vous occupez dans la Fondation Roi Baudouin ?**

- Full-time employee / Employé à temps plein
- Part-time employee / Employé à temps partiel
- Freelancer / Travailleur indépendant
- Consultant / Consultant
- Volunteer / Bénévole

**5. Are you a project manager or a team member? | Vous êtes le manager du projet ou un membre du team ?**

- Project Manager / Manager du projet
- Team member / Membre de l'équipe

**Teamwork during Covid-19 pandemic | Travail d'équipe pendant la pandémie de Covid-19**

**6. Did you take part in a working team before Covid-19 pandemic? | Est-ce que vous avez fait partie d'une équipe de travail avant la pandémie ?**

- Yes / Oui
- No / Non

*If the answer is yes, continue to question 5. If the answer is no, go to question 6.*

**7. How was the team managed? | Comment était gérée l'équipe?**

- Face-to-face / En présentiel
- 100% Online / 100% Virtuel
- Hybrid mode (Face-to-Face and Online) / Hybride (En présentiel et En-ligne)

**8. Did you take part in a working team in 2020? / Est-ce que vous avez fait partie d'une équipe de travail en 2020 ?**

- Yes / Oui
- No / Non

*If the answer is yes, go to question 7. If the answer is no, go to question number 16.*

**9. Please write here the name of the project you were working on in 2020. | S'il vous plaît écrivez ici le nom du projet auquel vous avez travaillé en 2020.**

If you took part in more than one project, please write all the names divided by a comma (,). | Si vous avez pris parti à plus d'un projet, écrivez tous les noms des projets séparés par une virgule (,) s'il vous plait.

Answer \_\_\_\_\_

**10. How was the team managed? | Comment était gérée l'équipe ?**

- Face-to-face / En présentiel
- 100% Online / 100% Virtuel

- Hybrid mode (Face-to-Face and Online) / Hybride (En présentiel et En-ligne)

ENG: Now, you are going to read a series of statements. All statements refer to the projects you followed during 2020. Please let us know how much you agree with each statement ranking it from 1 to 5 according to the Likert scale below.

1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither agree nor disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree

FR : Maintenant nous allons vous montrer une série d'affirmations. Toutes les affirmations concernent les projets que vous avez suivi en 2020. Veuillez nous dire combien vous êtes d'accord avec chacune d'elles en votant de 1 à 5 selon l'échelle de Likert en bas.

1 = Pas du tout d'accord; 2 = Pas d'accord; 3 = Ni en désaccord ni d'accord; 4 = D'accord; 5 = Tout à fait d'accord

**11. Covid-19 pandemic has brought some organizational changes on the project I was/am working on. | La pandémie de Covid-19 a amené des changements au niveau organisationnel sur le projet sur lequel je travaillais/travaille.**

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5.

**12. Some operational objectives of the project had to change because of Covid-19 pandemic. | Des objectifs opérationnels du projet ont changés à cause de la pandémie de Covid-19.**

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5.

**13. It has been easy to adapt to all the changes in team-working brought by Covid-19 pandemic. | Cela a été facile de s'adapter aux changements concernant le travail en équipe amenés par la pandémie de Covid-19.**

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5.

**14. Some phases of the project were delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic. | Des phases du projet ont eu des retards à cause de la pandémie de Covid-19.**

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5.

**15. The accomplishment of the entire project was delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic. | La réussite finale du projet a eu des retards à cause de la pandémie de Covid-19.**

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5.

**16. There have been changes on the project's financial budget because of Covid-19 pandemic. | Il y a eu des changements du budget financier du projet à cause de la pandémie de Covid-19.**

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5.

**17. It has been difficult to manage some operational phases of the project online and respecting the Covid-19 sanitary measures. | Cela a été difficile de gérer des phases opérationnelles du projet en modalité virtuelle et en respectant les mesures sanitaires pour le Covid-19.**

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5.

#### **General remarks | Remarques générales**

ENG: You have almost completed the survey! Just a few more general questions on how you perceived the changes brought by Covid-19 pandemic.

FR : Le sondage est presque terminé ! Veuillez-nous répondre juste à quelque dernière question sur comment vous avez perçu les changements amenés par la pandémie de Covid-19.

**18. Covid-19 has affected the way KBF manages projects. | La Covid-19 a affecté la manière dans laquelle la FRB gère les projets.**

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5.

**19. I would describe my first approach to telework as complicated. | Je décrirais ma première approche au télétravail comme compliquée.**

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5.

**20. The transition to remote work made me feel disoriented at the beginning. | Le passage au télétravail m'a fait ressentir désorienté tout au début.**

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5.

**21. The transition to remote work made me feel emotionally stressed. | Le passage au télétravail m'a fait ressentir du stress émotionnel.**

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5.

**22. The transition to remote work pointed out the importance of human relations, making me know better my colleagues. | Le passage au télétravail a relancé l'importance des relations humaines, en me portant à connaître mieux mes collègues.**

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5.

**23. I easily adapted to telework. | Je me suis facilement adapté au télétravail.**

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5.

**24. I worked more hours than usual because of teleworking. | En télétravail j'ai travaillé plus d'heures qu'avant.**

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5.

**25. The extra-hours I worked were not sufficient to face the emergency. | Les heures de travail en plus que j'ai faites n'ont pas été suffisantes à gérer l'urgence.**

To complete only if answered 4 or 5 at the previous question | A compléter seulement si vous avez répondu 4 ou 5 à la question précédente.

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5.

**26. I found it more difficult to carry out my daily tasks because of telework and Covid-19. | J'ai trouvé plus de difficulté à faire mes tâches quotidiennes à cause du télétravail et du Covid-19.**

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5.

**27. I think some tasks I had to carry out became easier thanks to teleworking. | Je crois que certaines tâches que je devais faire sont devenues plus faciles grâce au télétravail.**

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5.

**28. Which tasks do you think became easier? | Quelles tâches sont devenues plus faciles à votre avis ?**

To complete only if answered 4 or 5 at the previous question | A compléter seulement si vous avez répondu 4 ou 5 à la question précédente.

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_

**29. I think that King Baudouin Foundation's activity was impacted by the pandemic. | Je crois que l'activité de la Fondation Roi Baudouin a souffert à cause de la pandémie.**

1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5.

**30. In which way do you think the Foundation was impacted by the pandemic? Please, give some examples. | Dans le pratique, de quelle manière vous croyez que la Fondation a souffert à cause de la pandémie ? Donnez des exemples.**

To complete only if answered 4 or 5 at the previous question | A compléter seulement si vous avez répondu 4 ou 5 à la question précédente.

Answer: \_\_\_\_\_

## **GDPR Regulation | Réglementation RGPD**

ENG: Data Protection Disclaimer

The questions contained in the survey are general only and not intended to address the specific circumstances of any particular individual or entity.

## Personal data protection

"The impact of Covid-19 pandemic on project management" survey coordinator is committed to user privacy. The specific policy for the protection of your privacy has been designed based on Regulation 2016/679 on the protection of natural persons concerning the processing of personal data and the free movement of such data and repealing Directive 95/46/EC (General Data Protection Regulation).

## Recipients of the Information

Your replies will be read and analyzed only by "The impact of Covid-19 pandemic on project management" survey editor. The analysis of the data obtained by this survey can be used for scientific purposes and may be published. The anonymization and confidentiality of the collected data are safeguarded at any stage of the study.

## Confidentiality and data security measures

Your survey answers will be stored in Paola Borgia's servers in excel format. Your responses will remain anonymous. No one will be able to identify you or your answers, and no one will know whether or not you participated in the study.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate. If you decide to participate in this research survey, you may withdraw at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you withdraw from participating at any time, you will not be asked the reason why. You may access, rectify or erase any data collected at any time during the retention period.

## Contact

If you have any questions about the research study or you want to exercise your rights please contact: [paolaborgia2@gmail.com](mailto:paolaborgia2@gmail.com)

## FR : Avertissement sur la Protection des Données

Les questions contenues dans le sondage sont seulement de nature générale et ne se réfèrent pas à des circonstances spécifiques ou à des individus ou identités particulières.

## Protection des données personnelles

Le coordinateur du sondage "L'impact de la pandémie de Covid-19 sur le management des projets" s'engage à respecter la privacy de l'utilisateur. La politique spécifique pour la protection des données personnelles a été conçue sur la base de la Réglementation 2016/679 sur la protection des personnes naturelles concernant le traitement des



donnés personnels and le libre mouvement de ces données, en annulant la Directive 95/46/EC (Règlementation Générale sur la Protection des Données).

#### Destinataires des informations

Vos réponses seront lues and analysées seulement par le créateur du sondage "L'impact de la pandémie de Covid-19 sur le management des projets". L'analyse des données obtenues par ce sondage peut être utilisé pour un but scientifique ou être publié. L'anonymisation et la confidentialité des données collectées sont sauvegardées à tout stade de l'étude.

#### Confidentialité et mesures pour la sécurité des données

Vos réponses au sondage seront stockées dans les serveurs de Paola Borgia en format Excel. Vos réponses seront anonymes. Personne ne sera capable de vous identifier ou d'identifier vos réponses, et personne ne saura si vous avez participé à l'étude ou pas.

Votre participation à cette étude est volontaire. Vous pouvez choisir de ne pas participer. Si vous décidez de participer à ce sondage, vous pouvez vous retirer quand vous voulez. Si vous décidez de ne pas participer ou de vous retirer, vous ne serez pas demandés pourquoi. Vous pouvez accéder, rectifier ou supprimer toute donnée collectée quand vous voulez pendant la période de conservation.

#### Contact

Pour toute question sur l'étude de recherche ou si vous voulez exercer vos droits, vous pouvez contacter : [paolaborgia2@gmail.com](mailto:paolaborgia2@gmail.com)

### **31. Do you accept GDPR Regulation? | Est-ce que vous acceptez la réglementation RGPD ?**

- Yes / Oui.

**Material 2: Structure of qualitative interviews administered to King Baudouin Foundation's leaders**

1. What is your position in KBF? Are you an employee or a volunteer?
2. When did you join the Foundation?
3. Since when are you a project leader?
4. Usually, how big are the teams you manage?
5. Before Covid-19, how did you used to manage your working teams? How did you usually organize to carry out the team activities?  
*Every information is important, so you can just describe your working process in the most precise way possible.*
6. Did you use online tools to do meetings or similar? What platforms did you used?
7. Did you start using new platforms when Covid-19 arrived?
8. What happened when suddenly Covid-19 arrived? Many things changed very fast and many restrictions where applied. Did this affected the projects you were managing?
9. Think now about a specific project you were carrying out when Covid-19 arrived. Were there some delays or did you have to change the way you were doing something?
10. Covid-19 decreased the amount of face-to-face communications and collaboration, creating a shift in the nature of work. Did you experience some difficulties related to those elements in managing virtual teams?
11. With the decrease in quality and quantity of casual and informal interactions, did you experience some difficulties in building trust and team cohesion?
12. Did you change your way to lead teams?
13. Working with volunteers, engagement is very important. Did you experience a loss in engagement due to the pandemic situation? If yes, how did you manage it?
14. Do you have something else to add about the way you lead teams was affected by Covid-19 pandemic?