COVID-19 AND GROUP DYNAMICS: EXTERNAL CRISIS MODERATES THE LINK BETWEEN INTRATEAM CONFLICTS AND TEAM EFFECTIVENESS - A LONGITUDINAL LONG-TERM STUDY TEAM EFFECTIVENESS DURING CRISES – COVID-19 CASE STUDY

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Abstract -
Aim of study - The study conducted on teams in the public and private sector examined the contribution of intra team conflicts on team effectiveness and whether these relationships change under crisis conditions: anticipated uncertainty [pre-pandemic], uncertainty [year following Covid-19 outbreak] and chaos [global outbreak of Covid-19]. That is, do external crises impact how intra team conflicts contribute to or impair team effectiveness? Frame of research – A three-year study that included four samples: pre-Covid, Covid-off set and one year & two years from offset. A self-report questionnaire was used in which respondents were asked about team conflict and their perception of team effectiveness. Gender &Frequency of Meetings control variable. Findings of study – Pre-pandemic, under conditions of anticipated uncertainty, an inverse correlation was found among men and women – the higher the level of intrateam conflicts, the lower the effectiveness. When Covid-19 erupted and its ramifications were unclear (chaos), no correlation was found between team conflicts and team effectiveness; intrateam conflicts did not contribute to or impair team effectiveness, in both groups. One-year Covid-19, under conditions of uncertainty, interesting correlations were found: a negative direct correlation between conflict and effectiveness among men with no such correlation found among women. two years after under conditions of uncertainty, interesting correlations were found: a negative direct correlation between conflict and effectiveness among women with no such correlation found among men.Implications – Research was innovative in that it focused on team effectiveness during crises. Pre-Covid-19, organizations invested in managing team conflicts, understanding them, and making conflicts constructive to maintain team effectiveness. In the case of external crises, teams apparently do not respond to existing team conflicts and performance remains high. As crises recede, men show trends of returning to earlier behavioural patterns whereas women continue putting conflicts aside and focusing on effective teamwork. This finding may show the importance of using teams during crisis and their ability for high-level performance despite intrateam conflicts.

Keywords - Intrateam Conflicts, External Crisis, Team Effectiveness, Gender.

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the challenges that managers in organisations face is dealing with certain conditions while keeping a high-performance level. In the last two years the world has experienced a crisis of uncertainty and chaos when Covid19 entered our lives. Many organisations had to face new challenges, some survived this period, and some disappeared. However, public administration organisations had to immediately focus on the situation and provide a wide variety of public services. The crisis experienced by the world did not pass them by, and on days of lockdown The employees of the public administration continued to provide public services and products. Sometimes these were the only organisations that operated when the rest of the world was in lockdown. The demand for public services and products while the pandemic rages raised the question: how does public administration continue to work and keep high performance? Did the external crisis Infiltrate the organisation and affect their performance?

In this research we chose to focus on the impact of conflicts within the team, on team performance, and asked to examine if during an external crisis (such as Covid19), do the conflicts among team members contribute to or hinder team effectiveness and does gender play a role in this relationship?

II. THE ORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The ways to achieve organisational effectiveness through teams and the ability of the team to achieve their goals and objectives set for them within the organisational framework (Aubé& Rousseau, 2011). It seems the most cohesive teams seem to be the most effective, A source of cohesion based on the common socio-cultural background of those teams (Kolodny& Kiggundu, 1980).This type of team effectiveness can be achieved thru number of ways, four categories can be identified in Choen, Ledford &Spreitzer (1996) effectiveness model; characteristics of the group tasks, encouraging supervisory behaviours, group characteristics and employee involvement (Choen , Ledford &Spreitzer, 1996). One of the biggest challenges organisations in general and teams in particular face is dealing with conflicts. We learn that the existence of unresolved conflicts within the team affects team dynamics and team performance (De Dreu&Beersma, 2005; Tjosvold, Hui & Yu, 2005).A conflict is defined as awareness of gaps between the desires and ambitions of individuals and groups that

are not in line with other individuals and groups in the organisation (Boulding, 1963). Past studies present theories about internal conflicts within the organisation that indicate that conflict may harm organisational functioning. These studies show that a conflict in a group reduces individual satisfaction and the effective functioning of the group (Evan, 1965; Gladstein, 1984; Schwenk& Cosier, 1993). On the other hand, there are studies that show that in certain situations conflict may have positive aspects. internal conflicts within the organisation may improve the quality of decision-making, as well as the strategic planning of groups and organisations (Cosier & Rose, 1977; Eisenhardt & Bourgeois, 1988; Mitroff, Barabba, & Kilmann, 1977; Schweiger, Sandberg, &Rechner, 1989). Within these conflicts, team members become aware of disagreements, mismatches in ambitions or mismatches in different passions (Jhen& Mannix,2001).Many studies emphasise the great contribution of women in the work teams (Setati et al., 2019). Zhao et al. (2019) are attributing to women in work teams: organisational ability (order), ability to bring innovative ideas and greater awareness of customer needs. The findings of their research indicate a positive relationship between teams consisting of women and men together and team effectiveness and claim that this effectiveness can be a result of combining the different cognitive abilities of men and women (Zhao et al., 2019). Lee, Choi & Kim (2018) research refers to conflicts in work teams and the gender of team participants. According to them, work teams are in a state of tension, not only because they are subject to tasks and goals, but also out of a conflict related to status, which creates tension in the relationships of team participants. Coping with this tension in teams varies in relation to the gender of the participants. According to evolutionary psychology, men strive for high status and achieve it through competition. This competitive behaviour manifests itself in aggressiveness and dysfunctional behaviours, which may lead to group hostility. Compared to men, women do not compete for high status, and therefore rarely come to competition and aggressive behaviours (Buss & Schmitt, 1993).This means that gender essentially affects conflicts between people in general and in work teams, when men tend to get into more aggressive status conflicts than women. In addition, it was found that women have a higher ability in interpersonal tasks due to high levels of interpersonal consideration and social sensitivity, and points to the integration of women in teams as moderating competitiveness (Lee, Choi & Kim 2018).

III. FRAME OF RESEARCH

A three-year study that included four samples: pre-Covid, Covid-offset and one year & two years from offset. A self-report questionnaire was used in which respondents were asked about team conflict and their perception of team effectiveness. Gender &Frequency of Meetings control variable.

IV. FINDINGS OF STUDY

Pre-pandemic, under conditions of anticipated uncertainty, an inverse correlation was found among men and women – the higher the level of intrateam conflicts, the lower the effectiveness. When Covid-19 erupted and its ramifications were unclear (chaos), no correlation was found between team conflicts and team effectiveness; intrateam conflicts did not contribute to or impair team effectiveness, in both groups. One-year Covid-19, under conditions of uncertainty, interesting correlations were found: a negative direct correlation between conflict and effectiveness among men with no such correlation found among women. two years after under conditions of uncertainty, interesting correlations were found: a negative direct correlation between conflict and effectiveness among women with no such correlation found among men (see table 1).

	Sample	Effective Teamwork / Intrateam Conflicts
Pre Covid - 19	N =106	-0.384**
	Men (53)	-0.330*
	Women (63)	-0.420**
Covid - 19	N =164	-0.62
	Men (59)	0.176
	Women (105)	-0.178
Year into Covid- 19	N =186	-0.274**
	Men (91)	-0.361**
	Women (95)	-0.197
Two years into Covid- 19	N =81	-0.429**
	Men (30)	-0.281
	Women (51)	-0.488**

***p<0.05,**p<0.01, *** p<0.001**
Table 1 – Correlation between team conflicts and team effectiveness

V. IMPLICATIONS AND ECOMMENDATIONS

Research was innovative in that it focused on team effectiveness during crises. Pre-Covid-19, organizations invested in managing team conflicts, understanding them, and making conflicts constructive to maintain team effectiveness. In the case of external crises, teams apparently do not respond to existing team conflicts and performance remains high. As crises recede, men show trends of returning to earlier behavioural patterns whereas women continue putting conflicts aside and focusing on effective teamwork. This finding may show the

importance of using teams during crisis and their ability for high-level performance despite intrateam conflicts. The finding of sample number 4 is surprising, and we did not find an explanation in the literature, and therefore we recommended here to examine the explanations among the participants through personal interviews to get answers regarding the transformation that took place between the women and the men.

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