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THE NEW "NORMAL": TRANSFORMATION OF THE STEREOTYPE OF WORK USING ICTS AND THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR MOTIVATION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

Background: The new reality is accelerating the business model transformation at a faster pace than ever before to ensure existential survival in a crisis for which no one was prepared. The COVID-19 pandemic is having a dramatic impact on society, business (entrepreneurship) and government institutions. The topic for the COVID-19 pandemic consequences and dissemination on modern society is in its infancy, at least because it is unfolding spatially and temporally on a local, regional, and global scale. This is a good opportunity to make in-depth analyses on the problem area under consideration. The authors' focus is to study the experience of entrepreneurs from EU member states to tackle the problems faced as a result of the pandemic using information and communication technologies (ICT). The research follows the following three stages: (1) preliminary research and specification of the opportunities for implementation of new technologies; (2) modeling and formalization of the entrepreneurs' experience focused on digitalization; (3) generating a set of innovative solutions that could be applied in enterprises focused on increasing the employees' motivation.

Objective: This study aimed to design new opportunities to rethink the organization of work using innovative solutions based on digitalization.

Materials and Methods: The authors' research is based on secondary analysis of empirical data and content analyses. Empirical data collected from empirical studies conducted by private and state sociological agencies, as well as authors' teams from scientific and educational institutions, are the arrays on which secondary data processing can be done. For this paper, several information arrays have been selected. The methodology of analysis connected with the impact of the crisis on the use and application of ICT in business is done in several directions. On the one hand, the influence in the international aspect is studied, on the other - on the sectoral level and, as a third aspect – in relation to the size of the enterprises. Data used in this paper is provided by the National Statistical Institutes and is based on the annual Eurostat model questionnaires on ICTs usage and e-commerce in enterprises. Various national and European surveys on COVID-19 are also considered. To test our hypothesis, we used comprehensive desk research based upon literature review in the period December 2021 – March 2022.

Results: The results of the study highlight several important points. On the one hand, the increased influence of ICT elements on modern business is clear. Businesses are increasingly using ICT in their work. These conclusions are at an overall European level, with an increase reported not only by EU member states but also by other European countries. On the other hand, Bulgaria ranks among the countries with a smaller increase in the use of ICT in business operations, compared to other non-EU member states. Structured measures were established in the light of a specific problem connected with the employees' motivation, the dimensions of the new normal were marked and suggestions about modeling the motivation environment were set. The proposed is applicable and adapted to the specifics of the emergency situations and the respective national context.

Practical Implications: These findings provide an overview of the experience of entrepreneurs from EU member states how to tackle the problems faced by the pandemic using information and communication technologies and the opportunities to increase the employees' motivation that could be used by academic and business representatives, public institutions, and private stakeholders.

Originality/Value: This would help companies improve the crisis management activities and implement management through motivation.

Key words: information and communication technologies, motivation, COVID-19 pandemic

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INTRODUCTION

The unexpected pandemic situation transformed the ordinary and business life, and this globally changed the way of doing business. In this paper we focus on a study of the experience of entrepreneurs from EU member states to rethink

the organization of their work using information and communication technologies and how the change of the stereotype of work affects the individual, team, and organizational level. All businesspersons had to search for new opportunities to avoid social unrest and bankruptcies and to prevent the next wave of the pandemic. In our opinion, this is a critical moment, because the stakeholder alignment refers to the nature of the organization's relationship with its stakeholders, such as customers, suppliers, partners, and investors. The paper investigates the building and development of supportive relationships with these stakeholders, applying ICTs in the era of isolation, home office, e-commerce, and recognizing and appreciating how these relationships benefit the organization. The focus of the research is the experience of entrepreneurs from EU member states to tackle the problems faced as a result of the pandemic using information and communication technologies (ICT). The subject of the paper is designing new opportunities to rethink the organization of their work using innovative solutions based on digitalization.

From the authors' standpoint the changing stereotype of work affects the individual, team, and organizational level and in this unpredictable situation it is very important to monitor the employees' motivation level. The measures taken to overcome possible demotivation following the COVID-19 pandemic contributes to better organization and decisions connected with the challenges. To test our hypothesis, we used comprehensive desk research based upon literature review in the period December 2021 - March 2022. The proposed methodology comprises three stages: (1) preliminary research and specification of the opportunities for implementation of new technologies; (2) modeling and formalization of the entrepreneurs' experience focused on digitalization; (3) generating a set of innovative solutions that could be applied in enterprises. The literature review on the topics includes a review of basic works and the latest publications (from the last 5 years).

As a result of the implementation of the present fundamental research, structured measures were established in the light of a specific problem, the dimensions of the new normal were marked and suggestions about modelling the motivation environment were made. The proposed is adapted to the specifics of the emergency situations and the respective national context. This result should support the process of development and subsequent management of emergencies, including management through motivation and the overall implementation of ICTs to overcome the consequences.

Our study makes several key contributions. First, the literature review gives a theoretical contribution defining the researchers' focus on ICTs and management through motivation. Second, based on a desk review, the elaborated suggestions contribute to the next stages of the research, planned to be made under the project (the paper is focused on a research task that must be fulfilled under the realization of a research project KP-06-DK-2/7, funded by the Bulgarian National Science Fund), namely the online survey, in-depth interviews, and focus groups. Third, the established opportunities for innovations during a pandemic will be presented to a broad set of connected parties, i.e. the responsible institutions of central and local government in Bulgaria, private stakeholders, academics, etc. Fourth, the increased influence of ICT elements on modern business is evident. These conclusions are at an overall European level, with an increase reported both by EU member states and by other European countries as well. Bulgaria ranks among the countries with a smaller increase in the use of ICT in business operations compared to other non-EU member states.

The paper is structured as follows: following the introduction, in the second part different statements and research are summarized based on a broad literature review. The latter is the framework of the study and is the basis for the third part, which presents the research methodology about the investigation of the COVID-19 impact on ICT usage by EU entrepreneurs. The fourth part presents empirical results about the COVID-19 Impact on ICT usage in different countries. The fifth part summarizes the good practices in the field of management through motivation and how to upgrade the motivation policy in enterprises during the era of predictable unpredictability. The paper closes with conclusions and recommendations for future research in the field of empirical study of the attitudes of entrepreneurs from EU member state about the change of the stereotype of work.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The new reality is accelerating the business model transformation at a faster pace than ever before to ensure existential survival in a crisis for which no one was prepared. The COVID-19 pandemic is having a dramatic impact on society, business (entrepreneurship) and government institutions. First, the impact of quarantine and social distancing on mental health and qualities of the human capital play a significant role connected with their professional realization. Second, the business organizations may have to regulate measures according to different policy environments. This crisis has reminded business

leaders about the importance to adapt and regularly test their response and resilience plans against different disaster scenarios (including pandemics) with their key suppliers and business partners. This includes using these tests to challenge assumptions (such as recovery times) and to develop means to measure resilience, response, recovery, and other key capabilities needed to anticipate, withstand, and recover from, and adapt to, adverse conditions. Third, public institutions must force adequate measures to revive the economy. These concepts can provide a framework for a responsible course of action at this pivotal period.

Governmental restrictions of economic freedom appear to impact entrepreneurial activity differently depending on the freedom restricted by government and the entrepreneur's motive for engaging in entrepreneurial action (1). Innovation is strongly associated with entrepreneurship. This association is usually traced back to the work of Joseph Schumpeter who defined the entrepreneur as an innovator and a person who carries out new combinations, in whatever position within a business (2).

The process of innovation has been defined as "the development and implementation of new ideas by people who over time engage in transactions with others within an institutional context" (3). These notions of developing new ideas and taking a chance on them to seize new opportunities seem central to entrepreneurs.

Entrepreneurship is described as an ability and willingness for development, organization and management of a business taking all the risks for gathering profits. The most popular understanding of entrepreneurship is the beginning of a new business but that is one of the myths that it is connected only with the creation of new business or development an existing one (4). The online version of the Oxford Dictionary defines entrepreneur as a person who setup a business or businesses (5) . Entrepreneurs exploit new opportunities and are associated with disturbing the market equilibrium. They often revolutionize industries overturning long-established technologies, business models and dominant companies (6).

For entrepreneurs, there is also the struggle and adversity that come from challenging the status quo of a market or industry (7). An entrepreneurial culture would seem to require collaboration and sharing, but also something more than that. As a result, the cohesiveness is envisioned to include the notions of collaboration, communication, and sharing, in addition to the notions of coordination and responsibility in the organization.

In this unpredictable situation, the employees work together, take responsibility for their actions, feel like the organization can do things on its own, trust that everyone is contributing in their own way and to the best of their ability, and believe that they can rely on others in the organization. This is partially captured by what Mintzberg (8) and Stewart (9) describe as "mutual adjustment" among employees, which entails a well-developed team, with flexible and task-oriented networks, informal external and lateral communication, and weak departmentalism.

The COVID-19 impact on the everyday life reflects the application of ICTs. More fundamentally, ICTs are our best chance to maintain social order during a pandemic. (10). The social order and social environment influence the motivation of employees and must be observed in the context of stabilizing and overcoming the consequences of the post-COVID era.

Many researchers state that the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have a positive impact on the effectiveness, productivity, and competitiveness of enterprises (11). By ICTs, it is understood the set of tools, normally of an electronic nature, used to collect, store, process, diffuse and transmit information. This brings together both physical devices (computer equipment, telecommunication networks, terminals, etc.) and the software or computer applications, which run on these devices. The impact of ICTs is also inevitable on economic life. Thus, entrepreneurial intentions and activities, which are considered as one of the engines of economies by many scholars, will both affect and be affected by developments in the ICTs (12). Therefore, the present study aimed to examine possible interactions between these two recent hot topics.

In European perspective, the development of ICTs is vital for Europe's competitiveness in today's increasingly digital global economy. Over €20 billion from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) were available for ICT investments during the 2014-2020 funding period. These investments were vital for the success of the Commission's objective of making Europe fit for the digital age.
In today's global network society, social structure and organizational arrangements are largely made up of information networks powered by information and communication technologies (13) (Castells, 2000). ICTs, broadly defined here to include internet, platforms, networks, phones,

apps, and databases, as well as underlying infrastructure, are a pivotal factor in the existing social order, particularly during the COVID-19 global pandemic. The importance of ICTs extends beyond identifying, tracing, understanding, managing, treating, and perceiving pandemics (14).

The paper also investigates the impact of innovative work practices and of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) on employees' motivations. The connection can be found on the one hand in increasing labor productivity due to new ICT technologies and innovations in enterprises, which allow to achieve a better and more efficient result of the work of employees. On the other hand, increasing the flexibility of work due to the opportunities that ICT technologies allow such as digital jobs, virtual teams, remote work, etc. create greater opportunities for the expression of the workforce outside the narrow confines of the fixed workplace. In recent years, with the increased use of ICT in enterprises, various studies have analyzed this relationship in different directions that reveal the positive aspects of human behavior in the work environment and the relationship between them (15, 16). Some results underline that the types of ICT that contribute most to the development of a motivational environment are those that facilitate internal information access (workflow) and those that facilitate internal and external knowledge access (Internet and e-mail). To obtain higher performance levels from their employees, managers need to design a work environment that fosters autonomous motivations above all (identified regulation and intrinsic motivation) (17). The use of the Internet allows employees to find information and knowledge easily and permits the increase of all motivations. This result is in line with recent works studying the links between the Internet and positive employee attitudes such as Martin and Omrani (16).

These relationships are especially relevant today during the COVID-19 crisis, when the ICT elements are becoming not only desirable but also necessary in the enterprises. The huge growth of their use at national, sectoral and company level underlines the importance and relevance of the relationship motivation - innovation and ICT technology.

COVID-19 IMPACT ON ICT USAGE – RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology of analysis of the impact of the crisis on the use and application of ICT in business is done in several directions. On the one hand, the influence in the international aspect is studied, on the other - at a sectoral level and, as a third aspect - in relation to the size of the enterprises.

Data used in this paper are provided by the National Statistical Institutes and are based on the annual Eurostat model questionnaires on ICTs usage and e-commerce in enterprises. It supports measuring the implementation of one of the six priorities for the period 2019-2024 of the von der Leyen European Commission – A Europe fit for the digital age. The strategy is built on three pillars: (1) Technology that works for the people; (2) A fair and competitive digital economy; (3) An open, democratic, and sustainable society. Furthermore, it facilitates monitoring of the EU's digital targets for 2030 set by the Digital Compass for the EU's Digital Decade, evolving around four cardinal points: skills, digital transformation of businesses, secure and sustainable digital infrastructures, and digitalization of public services (Eurostat Page).

The statistical unit is the enterprise and percentage (%) of enterprises. The unit of measurement of the variables is the percentage of enterprises which have used those ICTs. The Statistical population in the paper is the enterprises with 10 or more employees and self-employed persons. Enterprises are broken down into size classes according to number of employees and self-employed persons: 10-49 (small enterprises), 50-249 (medium enterprises), 250+ (large enterprises), 10+ (total).

The analysis procedure is divided into the following stages:

- National level (EU-Member States, Iceland and Norway, Candidate countries and potential Candidate countries).
- Bulgarian economic sector level.
- Bulgarian enterprise size level.

The software used in this paper for processing economic data and conducting economic analysis at national, sectoral and enterprise level is Python.

COVID-19 IMPACT ON ICT USAGE IN DIFFERENT COUNTRIES – EMPIRICAL RESULTS

The survey at the national level in the EU member states and other countries on the use of ICT in the enterprises of the same countries is graphically presented in **Figure 1.**

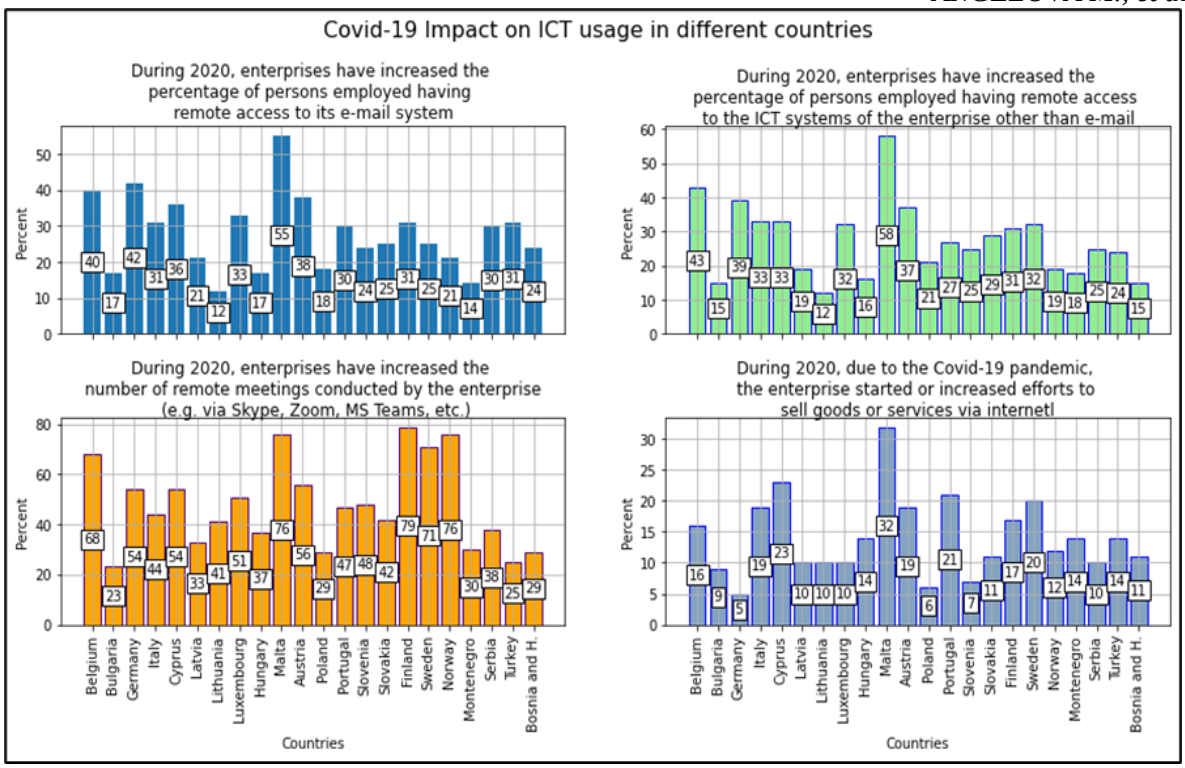

Figure 1. ICT usage at national level
Source: NSI, Bulgaria

The use of ICT at the national level is done through four indicators:

- During 2020, enterprises have increased the percentage of persons employed, having remote access to its e-mail system.
- During 2020, enterprises have increased the percentage of persons employed, having remote access to the ICT systems of the enterprise other than e-mail.
- During 2020, enterprises have increased the number of remote meetings conducted by the enterprise (e.g. via Skype, Zoom, MS Teams, etc.).
- During 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the enterprises started or increased efforts to sell goods or services via internet (e-commerce).

The results of the graphical analysis are supported by the descriptive analysis presented in **Figure 2**. The average percentage of enterprises between countries during 2020 that have increased the percentage of persons employed having remote access to its e-mail system is 27,95%. The lowest value of 12% is for enterprises in Lithuania, with less than 20% also countries such as Montenegro (12%), Bulgaria and Hungary (17%) and Poland (18%). On the other side, the highest percentage is Malta with 55%, with over 40% also Germany with 42% and Belgium with 40%. The difference between the highest and the lowest value is 43 percentage points.

	During 2020, enterprises have increased the percentage of persons employed having remote access to its e-mail system	During 2020, enterprises have increased the percentage of persons employed having remote access to the ICT systems of the enterprise other than e-mail	During 2020, enterprises have increased the number of remote meetings conducted by the enterprise (e.g. via Skype, Zoom, MS Teams, etc.)	During 2020, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the enterprise started or increased efforts to sell goods or services via internet
count	22.000000	22.000000	22.000000	22.000000
mean	27.954545	27.409091	47.772727	14.090909
std	10.316318	10.900673	17.388918	6.391282
min	12.000000	12.000000	23.000000	5.000000
25%	21.000000	19.000000	34.000000	10.000000
50%	27.500000	26.000000	45.500000	13.000000
75%	32.500000	32.750000	55.500000	18.500000
max	55.000000	58.000000	79.000000	32.000000

Figure 2. Descriptive table on ICT use at national level
Source: Own calculations

The average percentage of enterprises in the countries during 2020 having increased the percentage of persons employed, having remote access to the ICT systems of the enterprise other than e-mails is 27,4%. The lowest value of 12% is also for companies in Lithuania. Countries such as Bulgaria and Bosnia and Herzegovina (15%) are also below 15%. On the other hand, the highest percentage is again Malta with 58%, over 40% is Belgium with 43% and Germany with almost 40% - 39%. The difference between the highest and the lowest value is 46 percentage points.

The average percentage of enterprises in the countries during 2020 that have increased the number of remote meetings conducted by the enterprise (e.g. via Skype, Zoom, MS Teams, etc.) is 47,72%. The lowest value is 23% for enterprises in Bulgaria. Countries such as Turkey (25%), Bosnia and Herzegovina and Poland (29%) are also worth less than 30%. On the other hand, Finland has the highest percentage - 79%, with over 70% are also countries such as Malta and Norway with 76% and Sweden with 71%. The difference between the highest and the lowest value is 56 percentage points.

The average percentage of enterprises in the countries during 2020 that have increased efforts to sell goods or services via internet is 14.09%. The lowest value is 5% for companies in Germany. Countries such as Poland (6%), Slovenia (7%) and Bulgaria (9%) are also worth less than 10%. On the other hand, Malta has the highest percentage with 32%, with countries such as Cyprus with over 23% and Portugal with 21%. The difference between the highest and the lowest value is 27 percentage points.

The difference in percentage points is clearly expressed by the standard deviation coefficient, with the largest range for the third indicator having a deviation value of 17.38 and the fourth indicator with the lowest deviation, having a deviation value of 6.39.

Figure 3 presents Paired density and scatterplot matrix graphics. Adding the correlation between the indicators easily visualizes the relationship between them and allows drawing conclusions based on their clustering. These findings further enrich the analysis of the impact of ICT on enterprises at the national level.

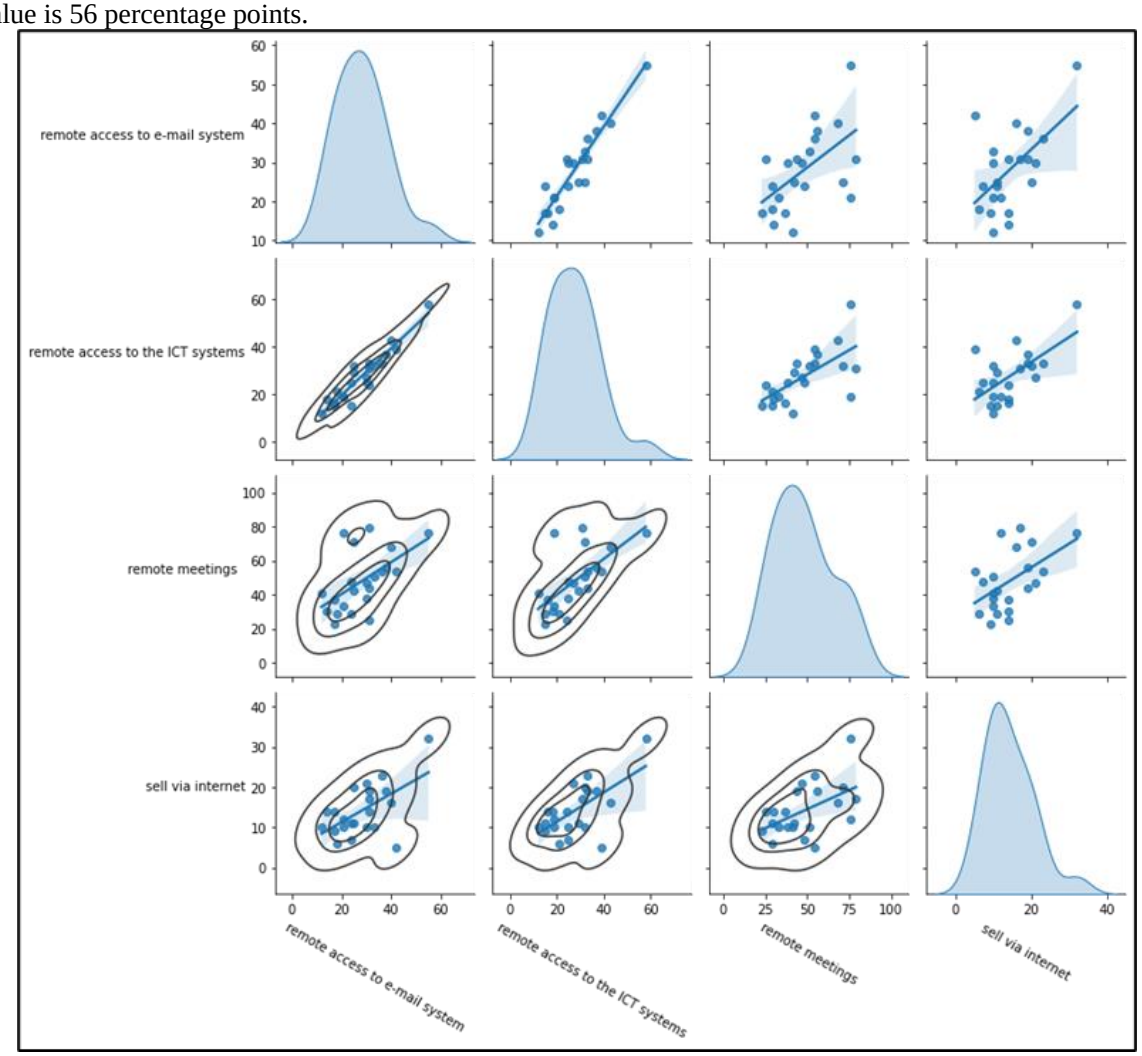

Figure 3. Paired density and scatterplot matrix
Source: Own calculations

The strongest correlation between the values of the studied indicators is observed between the increase in the remote access to e-mail systems and the remote access to the ICT systems. The clearly expressed linear dependence ends with a peak at which the country with the highest value in one indicator has the highest value in the other as well - Malta.

Based on the examination of the other indicators, an interesting convergence is observed of the indicators 'remote meeting' and 'remote access to e-mail system'. Outside of the general linear distribution of values are three countries - Finland, Malta, and Norway, which stand out as a cluster group with extremely similar values.

The weakest correlation is observed between the values of the countries for the indicators 'remote access to e-mail system' and 'sale via internet'.

Figure 4 shows the effect of the coronavirus infection on the increase of the ICT elements. The impact is studied at the level of the economic sectors in Bulgaria through an effect based on fully due, partial due or lack of influence – not at all due.

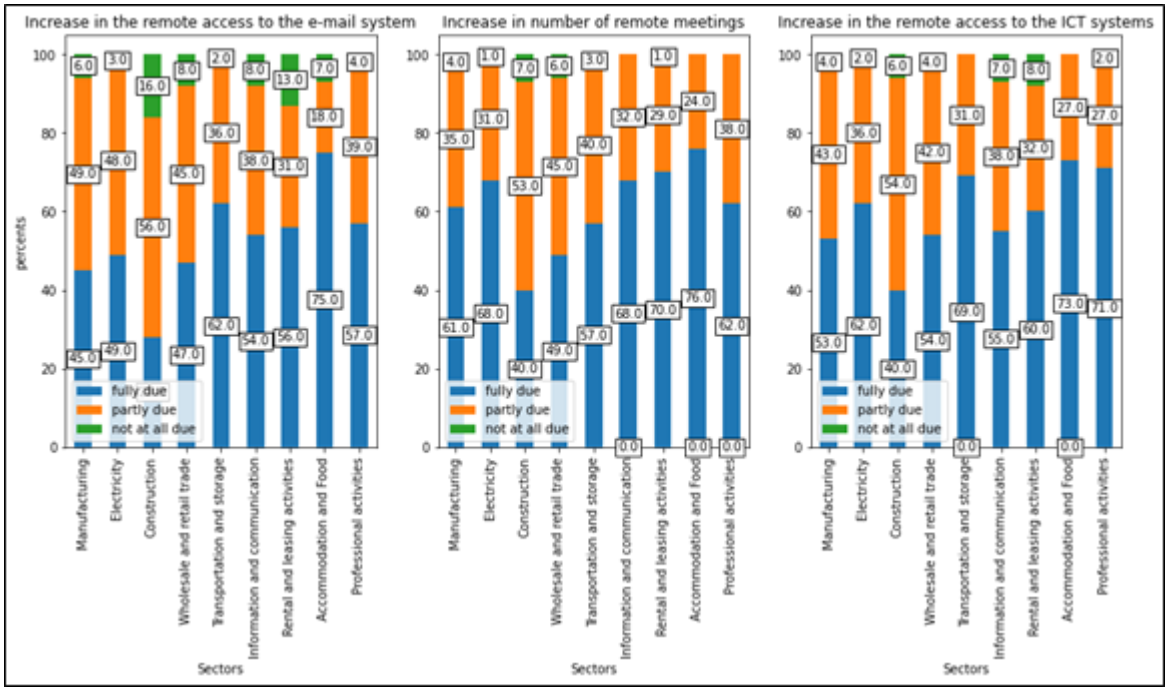

Figure 4. Increase in ICT usage in the economic sectors in Bulgaria due to COVID-19
Source: Own calculations based on data of NSI

The results show that all economic sectors in Bulgaria point to the COVID-19 epidemic as a major factor in increasing the elements of ICT.

The increase in remote access to e-mail as a result of fully due to COVID-19 is pointed by 53% of the enterprises. An increase in part due to COVID-19 was reported by an average of 40% of the enterprises. An average of 7% reported an increase not due at all to COVID-19 crisis. The strongest increase entirely due to the coronavirus was reported by the Accommodation and Food sector (75%), the lowest by the construction sector (28%). The sector with the strongest increase fully due and partly due to COVID-19 is Transportation and storage (98%), and the sector with the lowest increase is reported by the construction sector (84%).

The increase in remote meeting as a result fully due to COVID-19 is pointed by 61.2% of the enterprises. An increase in part due to COVID-19 was reported by an average of 36.3% of the enterprises. An average of 2.4% reported an increase not due at all to the COVID-19 crisis. The strongest increase entirely due to the coronavirus was reported by the Accommodation and Food sector (76%), the lowest - by the construction sector (40%). The sector with the strongest increase fully due and partly due to COVID-19 is Information and communication, Accommodation and Food, Professional activities sector almost 100%, and the sector with the lowest increase is reported by the construction sector (93%) and Wholesale and retail trade sector (94%).

The increase in remote access to ICT systems as a result fully due to COVID-19 is pointed by 59.6% of the enterprises. An increase in part due to COVID-19 was reported by an average of 36.6% of the enterprises. An average of 3.6% reported an increase not due at all to the COVID-19 crisis.

The strongest increase entirely due to the coronavirus was reported by the Accommodation and Food sector (73%), the lowest by the construction sector (40%). The sector with the strongest increase fully due and partly due to COVID-19 is Transportation and storage, Accommodation and Food sector almost 100%, and the sector with the lowest increase is reported by the Rental and leasing activities sector (92%). The conclusions from the presented data show that over 90% of all enterprises in the economic sectors indicate that the increase in the elements of ICT is entirely or partially due to COVID-19. The strongest is the change in the Accommodation and Food sector and the lowest in the construction sector. Of the used indicators, the increase in remote meetings is most dependent on COVID-19, while the increase in remote access to e-mail has the highest percentage out of those, not at all due to COVID-19.

Out of about 1.4 million EU enterprises with at least 10 employees and self-employed persons, a sample of almost 135000 was surveyed (survey 2021). Of the 1.4 million enterprises, approximately 83 % were small enterprises (10-49 employees and self-employed persons), 14 % medium (50-249) and 3 % large (250 or more).

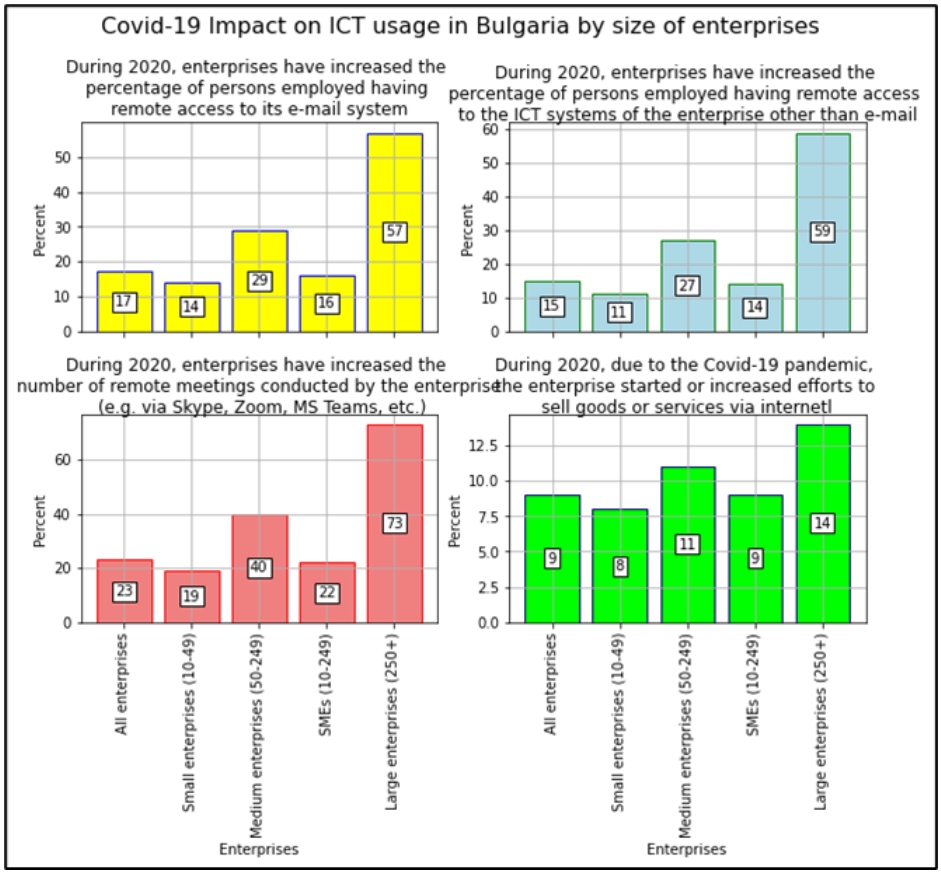

Figure 5. ICT usage in Bulgaria according to the enterprise size
Source: Own calculations based on data of NSI

The data in **Figure 5** show that 17% of all enterprises in Bulgaria during 2020, have increased the percentage of persons employed, having remote access to its e-mail system. Despite the low average value for the country, the percentage of large enterprises is 57%, and for medium-sized enterprises it is also higher than the national average of 29%. On the other hand, the percentage for small enterprises is only 14% and the average for small and medium enterprises is 16%.

Additionally, 15% of all enterprises in Bulgaria during 2020 have increased the percentage of persons employed, having remote access to the ICT systems of the enterprise other than e-mail. Despite the low average for the country, the percentage for large enterprises is 59%, and for medium-sized enterprises it is also higher than the national average of 27%. On the other hand, the percentage for small enterprises is only 11% and the average for small and medium enterprises is 14%.

The data also show that 23% of all enterprises in Bulgaria during 2020 have increased the number of remote meetings conducted by the enterprise (e.g. via Skype, Zoom, MS Teams, etc.). Despite the low average for the country, the percentage for large enterprises is 73%, and

for medium-sized enterprises it is also higher than the national average of 40%. On the other hand, the percentage for small enterprises is only 19% and the average for small and medium enterprises is 22%.

The data also show that 9% of all enterprises in Bulgaria during 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, started or increased efforts to sell goods or services via internet. Despite the low average for the country, the percentage for large enterprises is 14%, and for medium-sized enterprises it is also higher than the national average of 11%. On the other hand, the percentage for small enterprises is only 8% and the average for small and medium enterprises is 9%.

The conclusions that can be made from **Figure 5** are that in large enterprises, the growth of the ICT elements is much bigger than the national average and is biggest in the remote meetings. The percentage of the medium-sized enterprises is also considerable. Unfortunately, for small enterprises, which are the largest number, the percentage is extremely low, not exceeding 20%.

NEW MOTIVATION POLICIES IN ENTERPRISES DURING THE ERA OF PREDICTABLE UNPREDICTABILITY

The human resource (HR) specialists state that to keep the employees motivated is an important and difficult task before COVID-19, however, they warn that the pandemic provided many new challenges. The entrepreneurs and CEOs of different industries focus the attention that "talent recruitment and retention, waning office culture and remote work are some of the biggest challenges facing CEOs post-pandemic. But the most urgent threat to a business' success - and potentially the most damaging - is the deterioration of employee motivation" (18). Many companies see a drop in employee engagement and motivation during the pandemic.

Living in the era of unpredictability, there are good examples of how to keep employees motivated. The University of Pittsburgh, for instance, published a guidance designed to support supervisors in helping to keep employees engaged and productive while working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic. They provide tips and tools and state that the pandemic can benefit all of us to shift our thinking from challenge mode to opportunity mode. The HR team suggests thinking ahead because it can be a moment for strategic and long-term planning. They state that thinking back in challenging times can be used to gather and examine data on previous initiatives, such as reviewing existing data to determine whether projects are meeting objectives, collecting new data using survey tools, etc. To think deep includes deciding to do a deep dive into systems you currently have in place. To think across and brainstorm ways that your work can impact others. Downtimes are ideal for developing ourselves and our teams, which means achieving development. The specialists' advice is to think about well-being since it is crucial that we all sustain our physical and mental health. It is necessary to align the priorities with all the stakeholders and continue to recognize and highlight employees' exceptional efforts, etc. The situation is ideal to brainstorm with the staff in ways that the team can provide a unique value to the University (performing a typical function but on a different platform e.g., email, newsletter, online, video, webinar, or social media). All the suggestions include good examples and practices, and the guidelines finish with the statement: "now is the time to think creatively, work collaboratively, and be alert to the opportunities around us."

Many big companies are leaning into hybrid work and letting team members alternate days they are in the office. However, the team remains fragmented. Furthermore, there are socioeconomic and mental problems that affect the employees. It is impossible in the pandemic to apply the power of regular team-building events but as the restrictions provided personal meetings there are lots of opportunities for thematic office meetings focused on personal communication and requested that no one talk about work. The corporate level of motivation including mission and vision of the company is also a good example to keep employees in touch. For instance, a CEO of a company suggests that they start reading the company's vision out loud. A new person would read it each week and it will keep everyone aligned and focused during a time when it is easy to get distracted. This step will result in higher retention and happier employees.

There are many investigations focused on how the pandemic changed the personal motivation and many researchers tried to make suggestions on how to tackle the problem and reinforce the level of employees' motivation. Research by Harvard Business School Dean Nitin Nohria and Paul Lawrence (19) suggests that the

humans are motivated by four drives: acquire, bond, comprehend, and defend. They asked 600 CEOs about the major and multifaceted concern that emerged and how to keep employees motivated when their world is crashing around them. The extent to which a job satisfies these four drives accounts for a large portion of how much an individual is motivated in their work. While improving the fulfillment of any one drive enhances employee motivation somewhat, the key to a major employee-motivation advantage relative to other companies comes from improving all four drives in concert. A major part of management is to keep them in healthy balance, for example, by giving rewards for both individual and team performance.

Zijada Rahimić (20) agreed that employees will be motivated to work and perform well in the company where they work if their safety is covered by the company. The opportunities of home office provide the employees with the feeling of safety, generally better work - life balance, but there is a decrease in interpersonal contact, feelings of isolation, and a high chance of misunderstanding. She suggests applying closer/emotional communication, virtual team breakfasts/coffee and visual touch that is significant.

The findings of Camilleri's (21) research have presented a critical review of the self-determination theory and its key constructs, as well as on other theoretical underpinnings that were drawn from business ethics and tourism literature. It shed light on the employees' job security as well as on their extrinsic and intrinsic motivations in their workplace environment during COVID-19. The study confirmed that the employees' intrinsic motivations were significantly predicting their organizational performance. Their identified motivations, job security as well as their employers' social responsibility were significant antecedents of their intrinsic motivations. Moreover, there were significant indirect effects that predicted the employees' productivity in their workplace during COVID-19.

The motivation during the pandemic is a central topic in research not only toward the employees but to stakeholders (22). Smaldone et al. (23) use survey data from 1027 Italian consumers to examine the relations between utilitarian and hedonic motives, trust in online shopping, perceived risk of COVID-19, attitudes, and online shopping behavior. Their findings state that utilitarian motives, hedonic motives, and trust have an indirect effect on online purchase behavior through attitudes.

The management through motivation during uncertain and critic situations is one of the good practices to survive together with the team. Applying good practices, surveying the motivation level every three months, focusing on different stimuluses to provide increase of the individual level of motivation is a prerequisite for a company's competitiveness. The human resources are a major „asset" of organizations and increasing their motivation needs to be a top priority for management.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study highlight several important points. On the one hand, the increased influence of the ICT elements on modern business is clear. Businesses are increasingly using ICT in their work. These conclusions are at the overall European level, with an increase reported both by EU member states and by other European countries as well. On the other hand, Bulgaria ranks among the countries with a smaller increase in the use of ICT in business operations compared to other non-EU member states.

Examining in detail the use of ICT by business enterprises in Bulgaria can highlight two main points. The first point is that the increase at sectoral level is reported by over 90% as a result of the coronavirus, either in whole or in part. Absolutely all sectors show an increase in the use of ICT in the enterprises without exception. The second main point is that the financial and organizational capacity is a strong factor for increasing ICT in the enterprises in Bulgaria through the prism of the size of the enterprises. These conclusions can be associated with other EU member states. It is the large enterprises that can make a stronger transition to increasing the use of ICTs, something that the small ones find difficult, despite the general trend of increasing as a result of both the coronavirus and digital business and new economic realities.

The employee's motivation is the other key aspect of this paper. Based on the use of ICTs every manager can investigate the problems connected with the working environment. In this pivotal period the focus must be on new methods and events for employee's engagement with the company's goals, vision,

and mission, on decreasing the feelings of isolation, and the high chance of misunderstanding. We suggest applying emotional communication, virtual team breakfasts/coffee and visual touch that are significant and are possible with the ICTs platforms.

The future research on the topic will be focused on empirical study based on a structured interview with citizens and companies located in Bulgaria about their perceptions and assessment for the influence of COVID-19. The elaborated suggestions and conclusions contribute to the next stages of the research, that is planned to be made under the project, namely, the online survey, in-depth interviews, and focus groups.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST
The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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