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An Economic Crisis in Action: The Effects of The Covid-19 Pandemic on Employees

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In partial fulfilment of a Masters Degree in Human Resource
Management

National College of Ireland



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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought with it a major economic crisis, as well as a health crisis. In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, the world has seen a number of issues arise. This research aims to identify and examine these issues and any other effects that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on employees. This study will examine an abundance of literature sources, which will assist in establishing five research objectives to frame this study. This study seeks to add to this collection of previously conducted research and aims to further enlighten people on the topic of employees in the Covid-19 pandemic.

Introduction

Background to the Study

Over the past year and eight months the world has experienced a significant amount of unrest. The Covid-19 pandemic has brought with it a prominent economic crisis. An economic crisis can be defined as; “a signifying period of social change or instability that evokes feelings of fear, panic and danger amongst organisational members. Either from an organisational or sociological perspective, an economic crisis can be viewed as a signifying period of change and/or instability which can draw the negative reaction of an organization’s stakeholders, and thus create potential threats for a firm” (Mitsakis and Aravopoulou, 2016, p.68). As the Covid-19 pandemic is still a relatively recent topic, there is not a lot of literature that has already been written about it. With even less being written about the experiences of the employees who have worked through it. As past literature has presented, there are a significant number of negative effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on employees. Recently, researchers have focused on the mental health issues of employees who have worked during the Covid-19 pandemic, more so than any other issue.

Research Aims and Objectives

This study focuses on five research objectives. These objectives include; identifying and exploring the main effects that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on employees,

identifying and exploring any positive effects that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on employees, identifying and exploring any negative effects that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on employees, grasping a better understanding of the struggles that employees have experienced throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, and seeking what employees plan to do in the future regarding their employment.

Research Outline

This research will follow a descriptive cross sectional, qualitative study that implements in depth qualitative questioning in the form of a survey using non probability sampling techniques. A questionnaire consisting of 20 questions will be completed by a sample of participants. This population sample will consist of employees (individuals who are acting by themselves) who have worked at some point during, or throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. These participants' situations before as well as during the Covid-19 pandemic will be explored, and common themes will be examined in great detail.

Structure of Study

This study will begin with an in depth analysis of all relevant literature, where the outcomes of all previous research will be examined, and expected findings for this current study will be drawn. Following this, the research question and objectives for this study will be developed and explained. Next, the methodology for this research will be laid out in detail. After this, the results of this research will be presented and analysed, followed by an in depth discussion regarding these results. There will also be a brief conclusion to this study in order to tie everything together.

Literature Review

An Economic Crisis

In this section, there will be results presented from studies that have been previously conducted. These previous studies concern an economic crisis scenario – more so, the Covid-19 pandemic, and a number of them can be linked to the effects that the crisis has had on the lives of employees around the world. Strategic responses to

challenging economic times are usually highly difficult for organisations to predict in advance. And, the issue of human resource management (HRM) and personnel management in crisis is still a relatively new theme. Therefore, not much has already been written about it. However, this is a fascinating situation as it leaves the opportunity for new qualitative research to be collected and investigated. This section will, however, analyse the studies that have been conducted surrounding the effects that the Covid-19 pandemic has already had on employees. This section will first look at the ways in which the Covid-19 pandemic has been depicted in the Irish media. Secondly, the Covid-19 pandemic in an Irish context, then the Covid-19 pandemic in an international context, and finally, the impacts that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on employees over the past two years.

The emergence and ongoing issue of the Covid-19 pandemic is something that many young employees in Ireland have never experienced before. However, in a business context it can be compared to that of the 2008 global recession. The global recession of 2008 hit Ireland particularly hard, with Roche, Teague, Coughlan and Fahy (2011) describing the Irish situation as “among the most acute of all developed economies” (Roche *et al.*, 2011). During this time, much of the Irish population experienced a significant increase in financial and personal strain. Recently, the Covid-19 pandemic has had similar effects on individuals. Some of the most common effects that employees have experienced over the past two years include; unemployment, stress, anxiety, depression, uncertainty, exhaustion, panic, a lack of motivation, income support, and a strong employer-employee communication. Therefore, this current study aims to further explore the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on employees, in an effort to gain a more thorough understanding of the topic of the economic crisis that has resulted from the spread of the Covid-19 virus around the world.

The Covid-19 Pandemic as Depicted in the Irish Media

The following three sources consist of news reports regarding the Covid-19 pandemic. Firstly, Ryan’s (2020) report examines the successful prediction of a 22 per cent unemployment rate in Ireland as of April 2020, following the first wave of widespread Covid-19 in the country. This article exhibits the panic and confusion

held by the country at the start of the pandemic, but attempts to keep a positive outlook for the future. It is interesting to compare the results of this study with the expectations of Ryan's (2020) article, with the finance minister stating; "we cannot sustain them indefinitely, but we will be able to sustain them for long enough to allow incomes to continue to be protected where possible" (Ryan, 2020).

Hennessy's (2020) article also dates back to the very beginning of the pandemic in Ireland. It details the support available to employees to get Covid-19 and need to self-isolate, as of March 2020. As it is early on during the pandemic, there is a great deal of uncertainty in protocol, however it is noted that "all employees who have sick leave in their contracts will get paid if they become sick with Covid-19" (Hennessy, 2020). In spite of this statement, Hennessy (2020) also warns that an employer is not yet legally expected to follow this.

Finally, Miley's (2021) article claims that as of May 2021, younger employees have experienced the highest levels of unemployment in Ireland during the Covid-19 pandemic. Miley (2021) also reports cases of younger employees experiencing "wage stagnation" (Miley, 2021), high costs of living, and unfavourable labour market conditions. In many cases, these factors have influenced young people negatively - highering the risk of young people engaging in "criminal activities" (Miley, 2021). For employees aged between 15 and 24, the employment rate dropped to a third below its pre-pandemic level, and remains there currently.

The Covid-19 Pandemic in an Irish Context

As has happened in Ireland during the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been a significant impact on the mental health of employees. As seen in the study by Kelly (2020) there has been a rise in levels of anxiety, depression and stress amongst employees in Ireland. Kelly's (2020) peer reviewed study examines three different time intervals; the first being from March to April 2020, the second from March to June 2020, and the third one taking place between May and June 2020. All of these intervals exhibit that "the combined effect of the Covid-19 pandemic and associated restrictions" (Kelly, 2020) have caused a notable increase in "psychological distress" (Kelly, 2020), affecting approximately one in five people of the general population of

Ireland. The results of this study from March to April, during the very first lockdown, report that out of the 1,000 people that had taken part, 41 per cent had felt quite lonely, 23 per cent had been clinically depressed, 20 per cent had clinical anxiety, and 18 per cent had experienced clinical post-traumatic stress. The second interval examined 847 respondents from between March and June 2020, with results seeing an increase in anxiety, depression and stress levels when compared to the levels that had been recorded before Covid-19 restrictions were put in place. During the final interval of Kelly's (2020) study, from May to June, 79 per cent of respondents reported an increase in generalised anxiety, 72 per cent reported an increase in health anxiety, 57 per cent experienced depression, and 54 per cent felt high levels of panic. In addition to these results, Kelly (2020) also examined a survey of 370 frontline working radiographers between March and May of 2020. Results show that 40 per cent of these respondents experienced "burnout symptoms due to the pandemic and 30 per cent considered changing jobs or retiring since the outbreak" (Kelly, 2020).

The research done by Gavin, Lyne and McNicholas (2020) also investigates the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on the mental health of employees in Ireland. Gavin *et al.* (2020) discuss the psychological impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on frontline workers, citing that individuals who suffer from mental health conditions that are pre-existent are more vulnerable to the effects that the pandemic has brought with it, including stress, depression and anxiety. This article finds that frontline workers are also particularly vulnerable to the mental health effects of the pandemic, "with potential also for increased suicidality" (Gavin *et al.*, 2020). This effect is more likely to be a risk during the mid-pandemic phase and the post-pandemic phase due to the fact that "economic contraction, constrained mental healthcare resources, individual vulnerabilities and the stark reality of dramatically altered lifestyles coalesce" (Gavin *et al.*, 2020) can emerge. This article concludes with a look to the future, claiming that the importance of prioritising the evaluation of the way in which mental health effects will evolve is vital if we wish to effectively handle them when the time comes. A particular focus is once again placed on examining the groups that are considered more vulnerable.

McMahon, Hatton, Stansfield and Cockayne's (2020) study revolves around the experiences of employees who worked in intellectual disability settings during the Covid-19 pandemic in Ireland. As individuals with an intellectual disability are considered more at-risk, an increase in responsibilities was inevitable for the staff who support them. McMahon *et al.*'s (2020) study consists of an online survey which was carried out using measurements of the "Copenhagen burnout inventory" (McMahon *et al.*, 2020), measurements of anxiety and measurements of depression. Results showed that of the 285 respondents, "moderate levels" (McMahon *et al.*, 2020) of both personal burnout and work-related burnout were recorded, as well as "mild levels" (McMahon *et al.*, 2020) of anxiety and depression being exhibited. Higher levels of personal burnout, work-related burnout, exhaustion, anxiety and depression were noted amongst employees who worked with individuals that exhibited "challenging behaviour" (McMahon *et al.*, 2020), and employees who worked in independent living situations. This article observes that given the levels of negative mental health effects on employees, employers and superiors must further consider the wellbeing of their workers.

The article by Byrne, Coates, Keenan and McIndoe-Calder (2020) examines the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on the Irish labour market. Byrne *et al.* (2020) have collected a variety of data sources for their article, including; records of pandemic unemployment payment (PUP), records of jobseekers benefit claims, records of individuals who received the temporary wage subsidy scheme (TWSS), and information of employees in the affected sectors from the data of the survey. The data collected dates from March and April 2020, during the first six weeks following the first cases of Covid-19 recorded in Ireland. Byrne *et al.* (2020) found that out of all of the sectors examined, the accommodation and food service activities sector saw the largest amount of job losses, witnessing a total of 127,000 job losses. Next was the wholesale and retail trade sector with 89,300 job losses, followed by the construction sector with 78,500 job losses. The administrative and support service activities sector had 45,400 job losses. The manufacturing sector saw 36,900 job losses. The professional, scientific and technical activities sector recorded 24,500 job losses. The human health and social work activities sector experienced 22,200 job losses. The education sector witnessed 21,900 job losses. The public administration and defence sector had 14,200 job losses. The

arts, entertainment and recreation sector had 14,000 job losses. The transportation and storage sector recorded 17,800 job losses. While a combination of other sectors saw 38,900 job losses. Many of these workers were made unemployed before the order to close non-essential businesses was even issued. Records also show that, overall, younger employees have “suffered the greatest number of job losses” (Byrne *et al.*, 2020) out of anyone.

The article by Enright, McGinnity, Privalko and Russell (2020) provides an insight into how the Covid-19 pandemic has affected non-Irish nationals living and working in Ireland. Enright *et al.*'s (2020) study consists of telephone interviews with respondents regarding their experiences both prior to and during the Covid-19 pandemic. The results of this study show a number of things; firstly that unemployment was far more common amongst Eastern European nationals than Irish nationals. Secondly, Western European nationals - including UK nationals, did not experience disproportionate levels of unemployment. Also, compared to Irish nationals, non-EU nationals experienced a “significantly lower probability of employment” (Enright *et al.*, 2020) following the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. Individuals who were employed in jobs that already involved some levels of working from home were far more likely to stay employed during the pandemic. Results show that Irish nationals, Western European nationals and non-EU nationals were more likely to be employed in these types of working from home jobs. Results also show that roughly 28 per cent of individuals claiming the PUP were non-Irish nationals. Enright *et al.* (2020) found that 47 per cent of Irish nationals were employed as key workers, 37 per cent of key workers were non-Irish nationals. Notably, “rates of key work vary across non-Irish national groups” (Enright *et al.*, 2020); with 42 per cent being African, and 42 per cent being Asian. Finally, Irish nationals were found to be more highly employed in health sectors and related sectors than non-Irish nationals, who made up 9 per cent of those sectors. Of those non-Irish nationals, 24 per cent were African and 26 per cent were Asian. It is important to note, however, that Enright *et al.*'s (2020) study does not include the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on refugees or asylum seekers in Ireland. Although, records from other European countries show that they are a “particularly vulnerable group” (Enright *et al.*, 2020).

The work by Crowley and Doran (2020) oversees the effects that working remotely during the Covid-19 pandemic has had on employees in Ireland. This article analyses data that was available from the Central Statistics Office of Ireland (CSO). Crowley and Doran (2020) found that if the potential for social distancing in a job is high, “then it is also likely that remote working potential is high” (Crowley & Doran, 2020). This has naturally created a considerable amount of uncertainty amongst employees, both at the beginning of the pandemic and during the lockdown periods. In particular, individuals who are employed in non-essential sectors such as hairdressing and beauty have experienced considerable stress and unrest regarding Covid-19. As the issue of the Covid-19 pandemic is that of a worldwide one, many of the effects that are felt by employees in Ireland will also be felt by employees in various other countries.

To summarise, the main issues that employees have experienced in Ireland are;

- Unemployment
- Remote working
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Psychological distress
- Stress
- Uncertainty
- Panic
- Exhaustion
- Personal burnout
- Work-related burnout

The Covid-19 Pandemic in an International Context

The study conducted by Cullen, Gulati and Kelly (2020) depicts the effects that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on the mental health of employees in China. This qualitative approach focuses on the feelings and experiences of 1210 respondents living in 194 different Chinese cities. This study took place from January to February 2020, when the first known cases of Covid-19 were recorded. Results found many instances of “psychological reactions” (Cullen *et al.*, 2020) to the Covid-19

pandemic. Some of these included “maladaptive behaviours, emotional distress and defensive responses” (Cullen *et al.*, 2020) in an effort to cope with the issues that were at hand. Once again, individuals who had pre-existing mental health issues were considered particularly vulnerable. Examining the results of this study, 54 per cent of all respondents rated “the psychological impact of the Covid-19 outbreak as moderate or severe” (Cullen *et al.*, 2020). In addition to this, 29 per cent of the respondents rated their symptoms of anxiety as moderate to severe, and 17 per cent of respondents rated symptoms of depression as moderate to severe. Cullen *et al.* (2020) state the importance of seriously considering these psychological impacts on individuals sooner rather than later, claiming that “we anticipate a considerable increase in anxiety and depressive symptoms” (Cullen *et al.*, 2020) amongst individuals who have no record of previous mental health conditions. Cullen *et al.* (2020) even predict cases of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) amongst individuals.

In another international context, the study by Wolor, Solikahah, Fidhyallah and Lestari (2020) analyses the role played by e-training, e-leadership and work motivation during the Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia. This study focuses on the experiences of 200 employees who belong to the millennial generation, which is defined as being born between 1981 and 1996. These individuals were employed at a Honda motorcycle dealers company located in Jakarta. This quantitative approach uses a side probability method sampling technique, as well as a proportional random sampling technique. Wolor *et al.* (2020) collected data through the use of questionnaire surveys and structural equation modeling. The results of this study exhibit positive effects of e-training and e-leadership on employee motivation and employee performance. Wolor *et al.* (2020) highlight the importance of companies paying attention to “the factors of e-training, e-leadership, and work-life balance to keep employees motivated and to maintain optimal employee performance” (Wolor *et al.*, 2020), with this being particularly important for remote or online working during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The study conducted by Moyo (2020) investigates the cases of employee disengagement that have risen amidst the Covid-19 pandemic in Zimbabwe. Moyo’s (2020) quantitative approach uses a non-probability sampling technique to select a

population of 961 participants in Matabeleland. These participants answered a questionnaire that was accessible between the months of June and October 2020. The results of this study show that despite the negative effects that the Covid-19 pandemic has brought with it, it has had a “significant positive effect on poor working conditions” (Moyo, 2020). This is true in the sense that more attention has been paid to the conditions that employees must reside in. Employers that had effectively catered to the proper health and safety needs of their employees were far more likely to “boost employee engagement” (Moyo, 2020) in the workplace. Thus, higher levels of positive behavioural outcomes were more likely to be seen amongst employees. Some of these outcomes include; overall job satisfaction, loyalty, commitment, and of course engagement. In a direct contrast to this, employers who did not pay attention to, or completely failed to “fulfill this obligation” (Moyo, 2020) resulted in higher levels of employee disengagement.

The study by Meyer, Zill, Dilba, Gerlach and Schumann (2021) analyses the psychological wellbeing of employees in Germany. This study maintains the belief that the duration of the Covid-19 pandemic, along with its demands, as well as personal and job related resources “interact in their effect on employee exhaustion” (Meyer *et al.*, 2021). Some of these demands of the Covid-19 pandemic include; job insecurity, working from home, “work-privacy conflicts, privacy-work conflicts” (Meyer *et al.*, 2021), and also the closing of childcare facilities. Meyer *et al.* (2021) list the related resources as; job autonomy, coworker social support, support from a partner, and “corona self-efficacy” (Meyer *et al.*, 2021). This study took place from between April and June of 2020. Data was collected using questionnaires that were distributed in three different waves over the three month period to voluntary respondents “from the general population in a non-representative way” (Meyer *et al.*, 2021). The results of this study showed that exhaustion was a common effect of the Covid-19 pandemic, and was far more prominent amongst females than amongst males. In particular, mothers experienced high levels of exhaustion - citing mask wearing, social distancing, and the closing of childcare facilities as factors. The presence of job autonomy and partner support did manage to mitigate a number of these effects. Employees also experienced exhaustion and stress which resulted from high demands in their place of work.

The study that was undertaken by Odriozola-Gonzalez, Planchuelo-Gomez, Irurtia and Luis-Garcia (2020) also investigates the psychological impacts that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on the employees. Participants of this study included employees as well as students at the University of Valladolid in Spain. The method of this study consisted of an online survey, which was made up of 66 multiple choice questions, and took place during the first few weeks following the first recorded cases of Covid-19 in Spain. Results of this study found that respondents had reported “moderate to extremely severe scores of anxiety, depression, and stress” (Odriozola-Gonzalez *et al.*, 2020). Notably, students reported higher levels of these issues than employees did when compared. Odriozola-Gonzalez *et al.* (2020) conclude with the suggestion that in case future crisis situations should arise, options for preventative measures should be seriously considered by employers.

Kumar’s (2021) study examines employee engagement levels both during the Covid-19 pandemic and after lockdown measures. Using the V5 model of employee engagement, Kumar (2021) investigates various employees located in two different countries. Firstly, the United States results reported only “a slight dip” (Kumar, 2021) in employee engagement. While, the results from India showed that essential employees saw close to a “complete transformation in their standards and operating procedure” (Kumar, 2021). The results from both of these countries demonstrated the importance of assigning new, challenging tasks to employees, rather than monotonous ones, in order to enhance their creativity, thus increasing employee engagement.

Yu, Park and Hyun (2021) also undertook a study that examined the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on employees. Their study took place from the 13th of March to the 21st of March 2020 and examined employees who worked at 11 different first class hotels in Korea. Yu *et al.* (2021) collected data through the use of a voluntary web-based survey questionnaire. There were 332 respondents to the questionnaire. The results showed that many employees experienced mental and physical fatigue, as well as high levels of stress and anxiety. Many employees also had “concerns regarding social gaze” (Yu *et al.*, 2021), with many feeling guilt and facing problems regarding their interpersonal relationships. As can be seen, many of these international studies share similar results with those of the Irish studies. Thus,

leading the way for predictions to be made regarding the expected results of this current study.

To summarise, the main issues that employees have experienced internationally are;

- Job insecurity
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Psychological distress
- Stress
- Exhaustion
- Employee disengagement
- Concerns regarding social gaze

The Impact of an Economic Crisis on Employees

To conclude this section, it is important to summarise the findings of these previous studies, as these findings may turn out to be particularly similar to the findings of this current study. Much of the literature that has been presented above demonstrates that the Covid-19 pandemic can have tiring effects on the mental health of employees, both in an Irish context and in an international one. All companies must evolve in a way that will sustain them during the particular economic crisis that is at hand - keeping the best interests of their employees in mind can have a rather large impact on the overall performance of the company. Both positive and negative effects can be seen in the lives of employees. Some positive effects on employees were the use of effective, consistent communication between the employer and employees, in addition to the feeling of being valued as a worker. Wolor *et al.* (2020) discovered the positive effects that e-training and e-leadership had on employees, paving the way for effective communication between respondents and their employers. And, the work by Moyo (2020) identifies the benefits of employers listening to and taking note of their employees' needs. The use of income support is also a fairly positive outcome of the Covid-19 pandemic. Byrne *et al.* (2020) found that younger employees were more susceptible to unemployment, and many claimed either the PUP, the TWSS, or jobseekers benefit claims. Although it is not ideal,

income support has been a massive help to many individuals who have been made unemployed as an effect of the Covid-19 pandemic.

However, most of these effects do appear to be negative, including; unemployment, stress, anxiety, depression, uncertainty, exhaustion, panic, and a lack of motivation. Unemployment, unsurprisingly, was the most common effect of the Covid-19 pandemic, with Byrne *et al.* (2020) reporting that employees who worked in the accommodation and food service activities sector suffered the most in Ireland. It was also found by Enright *et al.* (2020) that employees who already often worked from home were more likely to remain in employment during the Covid-19 pandemic. The presence of stress was another effect that was commonly seen amongst employees. Odriozola-Gonzalez *et al.* (2020) reported levels of moderate to severe stress, while Kelly (2020) found cases of clinical post-traumatic stress in employees. Many cases of anxiety were also seen amongst employees. McMahon *et al.* (2020) reported mild to high levels of anxiety, and Cullen *et al.* (2020), as well as Odriozola-Gonzalez *et al.* (2020) saw levels of moderate to severe anxiety. Kelly (2020) reported 23 per cent of their respondents to be clinically depressed. Gavin *et al.* (2020) found that frontline workers and employees who had pre-existing mental health conditions were far more likely to experience depression, and even suicidal thoughts. Cullen *et al.* (2020) also saw many respondents rate their symptoms of depression as moderate or severe. Many employees have experienced high levels of uncertainty and unrest, as Crowley and Doran (2020) have found, this is particularly prominent in the lives of non-essential employees - such as those who are employed in the beauty of hairdressing industry. Another particularly common effect of the Covid-19 pandemic is exhaustion. McMahon *et al.* (2020) found moderate levels of both work-related and personal burnout amongst employees. Kelly (2020) also witnessed high levels of burnout and exhaustion, with many respondents even considering leaving their jobs. Kelly's (2020) study also found that over half of the employees who took part experienced high levels of panic. Finally, all of these factors combined led to a lack of motivation amongst employees. For this reason, Kumar (2021) stated the importance of keeping tiring, monotonous tasks at bay, and assigning challenging, creative tasks to employees in an effort to increase their engagement and overall motivation. As all of the literature that has been analysed above dates from 2020 to 2021, it is important to keep in

mind the recency of this topic and the deficient amount of peer-reviewed works that are available to us. The Covid-19 pandemic is an ongoing issue that is constantly evolving. Therefore it will be interesting to discover new or reaffirming insights that this current study might uncover.

Research Question and Objectives

Objectives of This Study

The overall goal of this research is to identify and explore what the main effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on employees are. Therefore, a fitting research question is simply: 'What are the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on employees?' As has been previously stated, the main objectives of this study include identifying and exploring what the main effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on employees are. Specifically, to seek what the positive effects of the Covid-19 pandemic are on employees, as well as the negative ones. In addition to exploring the positive and negative effects that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on employees, this study will also examine a number of sub-objectives. These include attempting to understand the main struggles that employees have faced during the Covid-19 pandemic, and exploring what employees plan to do in the future in terms of their employment. These research objectives have been constructed following a thorough literature review and analysis. These objectives will assist in the establishment of a worthwhile study.

So, to summarise, the research objectives of this study are;

1. To identify and explore the main effects that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on employees.
2. To identify and explore any positive effects that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on employees.
3. To identify and explore any negative effects that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on employees.

4. To grasp a better understanding of the struggles that employees have experienced throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.
5. To seek what employees plan to do in the future regarding their employment.

Expected Findings

There have been a number of expected findings that have been drawn from the previously analysed literature. The most frequently reported effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on employees is psychological distress. Kelly (2020) reported high levels of anxiety, depression, stress, panic, and burnout symptoms. As well as a number of cases of post-traumatic stress. Gavin *et al.* (2020) also reported high levels of anxiety, depression and stress. Noting that individuals who had pre-existing mental health issues were more at risk of these symptoms, and were also at a higher risk of experiencing suicidal feelings. The study by McMahon *et al.* (2020) also saw high levels of psychological distress, in particular anxiety and depression. Crowley and Doran (2020) found high levels of stress and unrest amongst employees. Cullen *et al.* (2020) also recorded high levels of psychological distress, including anxiety, depression, stress, post-traumatic stress, maladaptive behaviours, and defensive responses. Meyer *et al.* (2021) viewed high levels of exhaustion and stress. Odriozola-Gonzalez *et al.* (2020) reported high levels of anxiety, depression, and stress. Yu *et al.* (2021) also found high levels of anxiety, stress, mental fatigue, physical fatigue. As well as this, many cases of individuals having concerns regarding social gaze were viewed, with many people feeling guilt and facing problems regarding their interpersonal relationships.

In addition to these instances of psychological distress that were recorded, unemployment was also a common effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on employees. Ryan (2020), Miley (2021), Byrne *et al.* (2020), and Enright *et al.* (2020) all recorded high levels of unemployment. Hennessy (2020) reported high levels of uncertainty amongst employees. While Crowley and Doran (2020) found many cases of remote working amongst employees. McMahon *et al.* (2020) reported cases of employees experiencing a significant increase in their responsibilities at work, which led to both personal and work-related burnout. Moyo (2020) reported that the Covid-19 pandemic had had a significant positive effect on poor working

conditions, in the sense that employers took more care to listen to and communicate better with their employees' needs. Moyo (2020) found that if employers did not listen to their employees, higher levels of employee disengagement would result. Wolor *et al.* (2020) noted the positive effects that e-training and e-leadership had on employee motivation and employee performance, as well as stronger communication from employers. And finally, Kumar (2021) found that employers who assigned fresh, more creative tasks to their employees saw a significant increase in employee engagement.

As a general reminder, the expected findings of this research include;

- Better communication from employers
- Unemployment
- Remote working
- Psychological distress - stress, anxiety, depression, panic
- Exhaustion
- Personal burnout
- Work-related burnout
- Job insecurity
- Employee disengagement
- Concerns regarding social gaze

Methodology

Developing An Effective Method

This section will outline the philosophy that this current study follows, and the methodology that was used to investigate the effects that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on employees. The review and justification for the chosen methodology will be discussed in detail, in relation to how these methods will achieve the objectives that have been presented previously. To summarise, the chosen method for this

study consists of a descriptive cross sectional, qualitative study that implements in depth qualitative questioning in the form of a survey using non probability sampling techniques. This research is exploratory in nature as it focuses on the experiences of individual employees and their views on the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. This method is formed around, and follows the Saunders research onion (2007). Therefore, each stage of this method will be described as follows; the research philosophy, the research approach, the research strategies, the research choice, the research time horizon, and the data collection methods that were used.

Research Philosophy

The most relevant methodology must be chosen in order to carry out the objectives of the study. The choice of a philosophical approach to research is crucial, as it cultivates the entire methodology. Clearly defining a philosophy for the study will help to set up an effective methodology and overall structure. With that being said, this study adopts an axiological philosophy. Axiology, which is a part of the theory of value, sees the importance of people's values or opinions from an ethical or moral standpoint, and the impacts that this can have on the collection and analysis of data. "Axiology addresses questions related to what is valued and considered to be desirable or 'good' for humans and society" (Biedenbach & Jacobsson, 2016). There are three dimensions to axiology; intrinsic value, extrinsic value, and systemic value. Intrinsic value refers to the pure value of something or someone, whether that is "an experience, a person, an act, or nature" (Biedenbach & Jacobsson, 2016), it is something that is universal. Extrinsic value is the opposite of this, it sees the value "for the sake of something else to which it is related to" (Biedenbach & Jacobsson, 2016), such as money. Systemic value is more logical. This dimension sees that something either follows the formal structure of what is considered valuable or it does not. Systemic value determines that there is "no room for degrees of value, but rather it affirms to a digital understanding - either belonging, or not belonging" (Biedenbach & Jacobsson, 2016). This current study asks what are the good effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on employees, as well as what are the bad effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on employees. A value is placed on the views and opinions of individual people. This study seeks to understand what employees deem good, bad, and what they would like handled better. As this study aims to understand all

possible effects that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on individual employees, rather than on entire places of work, it can be deduced that axiology is the most suitable research philosophy for this study.

Research Approach

The research question and objectives for this study have been developed using pre-existing evidence from various literature sources. This current study aims to collect primary data which can then be analysed and compared to the data from these previously analysed studies. Therefore, a deductive approach has been adopted for this study. A deductive approach to research includes an investigation into research that others have already conducted, an analysis of this research, and a comparison of this research with the new research of the current study. The aim of this current research is to further explore these effects on employees, and compare the results of this study with an already established knowledge base. Therefore, this study has constructed and used a survey in order to create an understanding of the observations that have been previously identified. Thus, it can be concluded that a deductive research approach will deliver the most effective results.

Research Strategy

The research strategy that this study has chosen to follow is a survey. In particular, an online survey in the form of a questionnaire. This method is useful for extracting relevant information about the issue in question. This current survey consists of a structured list of 20 questions, in order to motivate as many participants to respond as possible, and was emailed to participants. This strategy is extremely cost effective and practical as it allows for remote participation in the time of a worldwide health crisis. This survey strategy should also collect a wide range of accurate, informative results regarding the opinions and experiences of all participants involved. With a large number of responses that a survey strategy allows for, the answers to these surveys can be thoroughly examined in an effort to look for common themes. Thus, allowing for the previously established objectives to be met. These surveys should exhibit a vast collection of data that will help to answer the main research question of this study.

Research Choice

This study aims to collect primary data in the form of a survey questionnaire, in an attempt to explore the experiences and feelings of individual employees in order to draw conclusions, rather than focusing on numerical data. Therefore, the choice was made to follow a mono method approach, in the form of qualitative research. Qualitative research refers to the collection and examination of non-numerical data in an effort to understand the opinions, experiences or concepts surrounding the phenomena which are at hand. Qualitative methods “have the potential to contribute significantly to the development of meaningful ‘quantities’” (Sofaer, 1999), and can provide profuse descriptions regarding an issue. A qualitative approach also allows for the investigation into unique or even unexpected events; such as the Covid-19 pandemic. This approach takes into account a wide range of various experiences and even gives a “voice to those whose views are rarely heard” (Sofaer, 1999). It is an approach which seeks to find reasons for specific human behaviours and the complex situations from which these have risen. From a human resource management perspective, a qualitative approach will allow for a greater, more in-depth understanding of the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on employees, and is thus the most appropriate choice for this research.

Research Time Horizon

This current study aims to examine how the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted the lives of employees. For the sake of this study, the research will focus on a particular period in time. This investigation deals with employees who have worked at any point during the time period from when the first case of Covid-19 was recorded in December 2019, to July 2021 when the Covid-19 issue was considered at a pandemic level. As the time period for data collection for this study has already been established, this study uses a cross sectional time horizon. As has been already established, this study will examine a period of 19 months, a cross sectional study operates on the basis of comparing a number of population groups at a single moment in time. All of the participants who were involved in this research answered the survey in July 2021, they gathered their thoughts and feelings on their experiences throughout the Covid-19 pandemic as of July 2021. Therefore, it is

important to remember that results from a cross sectional study fit into a particular frame, or rather a snapshot.

Data Collection Method

As has been previously detailed, this study takes an axiological philosophical stance. However, in deciding on the most appropriate methodology for this study, a number of other factors must be taken into account in addition to the philosophy which has been adopted. Practical issues, for example; money and time, are also important to consider when developing a methodology. As this study deals with primary data, it is more likely to encounter financial issues. Often research takes a fair amount of time to complete which can create obstacles for the researcher. Another fairly prominent factor to consider is that of the Covid-19 pandemic itself. It is clear that conducting any kind of study during a global health crisis would be extremely difficult. The researcher and participants would not likely be meeting in person, therefore an effective alternative method would need to be developed. It was after considering all of these factors, that the decision to use an online survey was determined. A survey can be defined as “a systematic method for gathering information from (a sample of) entities for the purpose of constructing quantitative descriptors of the attributes of the larger population of which the entities are members” (Jansen, 2010). To reiterate, in the case of this study a qualitative approach will be used rather than a quantitative one. Surveys are a relatively inexpensive method for data collection - in the case of this current study, no cost was required at all to create and distribute the surveys to participants. A cross sectional survey method can be effectively implemented in a short amount of time. A survey also allows for remote participation, in order to make sure that there are no elevated physical health risks during this time.

Sample Design

For this study, as is the case with all survey approaches, it is preferable to collect a large number of responses in order to meet the previously established objectives for this research. As surveying an entire group of interest would be all too time-consuming, sampling is a necessary tool. For this survey, non-probability sampling was used to gather participants, in particular, convenience sampling. This sampling

technique is true to its name - it is quite simply, convenient, and it is easier to utilise the techniques which are linked to non-probability sampling. Invitations to participate in the survey were emailed to over 300 individuals. Those who were willing to participate could simply click on a link included in the email which would bring them straight to the questionnaire. This email was of course accompanied by a cover letter briefly explaining the study. This survey received 108 respondents. These respondents were employed in the private sector, public sector, semi-state owned, and some were self employed. The respondents consisted of 'individual employees', which for the purpose of this study can be defined as; any person over the age of 18 who has worked between December 2019 and July 2021. The study was extended to participants all over the world, in order to get broader, more reliable results. All answers were anonymous and all participants had to be over the age of 18 in order to participate.

Questionnaire Design

The two most important goals of this questionnaire design were to; reduce the measurement error and reduce non-responses. With that in mind, this questionnaire consists of 20 questions - with 10 of these questions requiring an answer, and the other 10 being optional. The majority of these questions were accompanied by multiple choice answers, however a number of them were open ended questions. They were included in order for the participants to provide more detailed and personal answers, allowing for a better understanding of their experiences and opinions. In total the questionnaire took roughly only 2 to 3 minutes to answer. This was designed with the intention of keeping all respondents' attention until the end of the questionnaire. The sequence of questions was carefully designed - starting out with general introductory questions and moving on to more detailed meaningful ones. The questionnaire was accessible online to participants for a period of 5 days from Monday 12th of July 2021 to Friday 16th July 2021. All of these questions can be fully viewed in the appendices section.

Validity and Reliability of Survey

It is highly important for a piece of research to produce valid and reliable results. As has been previously discussed in detail, a survey assists in collecting highly

structured data, which in turn will allow for the identification of variations, relationships, and patterns between variables in their natural environment. Due to this fact there is less of a chance of manipulating or controlling the research setting. This explanation allows for the justification of the validity and reliability of the survey in question.

Research Limitations

It is important to note any possible limitations that this study might face. A lack of time to achieve a wide range of results is definitely a valid limitation. A longitudinal study might have allowed for more thorough investigation over a longer period of time, as well as a higher response rate to the survey. However, this study can allow for preliminary observations for larger studies, and adds to an ever growing knowledge base for research regarding the Covid-19 pandemic that has already been completed.

In summary, this descriptive, cross sectional, qualitative survey approach is the most suitable method for this research. This approach presents the most appropriate tools for data collection regarding the research question and objectives of this study. This method is the most cost effective, time effective, and safe approach during the current world climate. And, it will deliver the most valuable and reliable results given the circumstances of this current study. The results of which will be presented in the next section.

Results and Analysis

Research Findings

This section will present and address the results that have been produced from this research, starting with the sample demographic. Although study is a qualitative one, numerical data will also be presented below in order to get a firmer grasp on, and a better understanding of the demographic of the population sample. The genders, age ranges, work sectors, work hours, and work start dates of all respondents will be discussed below. After this, the main effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on

employees will be looked at. In particular, the reasons why some respondents stayed in employment during the Covid-19 pandemic, the areas of essential work that respondents were a part of, the reasons why some respondents did not stay in employment during the Covid-19 pandemic, the reasons why respondents were or were not satisfied with their jobs before the Covid-19 pandemic hit, and the biggest impacts that respondents had noticed regarding their mental health. Next, any and all positive effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on employees are addressed. Which is followed by the negative effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on employees. Following this, there is an examination of respondents who have worked throughout or at some point during the Covid-19 pandemic. The points that will be discussed include; how respondents viewed their workload and responsibility levels during the Covid-19 pandemic, whether respondents have or have not already gone back to work, the conditions under which these respondents agreed to go back to work, and the ways in which respondents have noticed changes in their workplaces. After this, the plans that respondents have for the future will be addressed. Specifically; the respondents who would consider going back to work, the respondents who would consider going back to their previous job, and the respondents who would consider finding a completely new job. Finally, there will be a summary of all of the findings, in preparation for the discussion section.

Demographic of Respondents

This section will establish the respondent population sample of this study. The sample consisted altogether of 108 respondents - 64 of these respondents were female and 44 were male respondents. In regards to age; 24 respondents were aged between 18 and 24, 12 respondents were aged between 25 and 34, 17 respondents were aged between 35 and 44, 43 respondents were aged between 45 and 54, 11 respondents were aged between 55 and 64, and only 1 respondent was over the age of 65. This population sample was made up of 34 respondents from the public sector, as well as 57 respondents from the private sector, 3 respondents from semi-state bodies, and 14 of the respondents are self-employed. When it came to working hours, 70 of the respondents reported working full-time, 33 of the respondents work part-time. Regarding the rest of the respondents; 1 respondent only worked in between lockdown periods, 1 respondent undertook volunteer work, 1

respondent cited themselves as a freelance cameraman, 1 respondent reported working full-time as a student nurse, and 1 respondent reported a mixture of both part-time and contract work.

The year in which all respondents began working in their current or most recent role is as follows;

- 1 respondent started working in 1979
- 1 respondent started working in 1981
- 1 respondent started working in 1989
- 1 respondent started working in 1991
- 2 respondents started working in 1993
- 1 respondent started working in 1994
- 1 respondent started working in 1998
- 3 respondents started working in 2001
- 1 respondent started working in 2002
- 2 respondents started working in 2003
- 1 respondent started working in 2005
- 1 respondent started working in 2006
- 1 respondent started working in 2007
- 1 respondent started working in 2010
- 3 respondents started working in 2011
- 1 respondent started working in 2012
- 2 respondents started working in 2013
- 4 respondents started working in 2014
- 5 respondents started working in 2015
- 2 respondents started working in 2016
- 4 respondents started working in 2017
- 5 respondents started working in 2018
- 7 respondents started working in 2019
- 8 respondents started working in 2020
- 9 respondents started working in 2021

Main Effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic

Many respondents of this study did stay actively working in their roles during the Covid-19 pandemic. For those who did stay employed throughout or at sometime during the Covid-19 pandemic various reasons were cited for staying in their roles. These reasons include;

- To support themselves and their family
- Having a strong passion for their job
- Their job allows for remote working
- They work with a great team
- The chance for career development
- They were employed on an emergency basis
- To support their lifestyle
- To save up money for travel post Covid-19
- To save up for educational purposes
- They were considered an essential worker

The majority of respondents of this study claimed to be essential workers. The areas that these essential workers were employed in are;

- Healthcare
- Wholesale and retail
- Service management
- Education or teaching
- Childcare
- Hospitality
- Television or broadcast media
- Construction
- Social welfare
- Advocacy
- Legal field
- Insurance
- Financial services
- Property industry

For many respondents of this study, working throughout the Covid-19 pandemic was not an option. A large number of respondents were made unemployed as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The respondents who became unemployed did so because;

- Their job was not considered essential
- Personal choice
- They suffered with a Covid-19 related illness
- They were laid off by their company due to downsizing

Respondents were asked if they were satisfied with their job before the Covid-19 pandemic hit. The majority of respondents answered that, yes, they were satisfied. With the reasons for this being;

- Being self-employed allows for more control over their life
- They liked the people that they work with
- They enjoyed meeting people which was an integral part of their job
- They were well paid
- They were following their passion
- They liked the variety of creative tasks
- They enjoy most aspects of their job
- The working conditions were good
- There was a positive atmosphere in their workplace
- Their job is rewarding
- They had good working hours
- Their job was very flexible
- They had a good work-life balance
- Their employer made them feel appreciated and valued
- There was an effective employer brand

A large number of respondents answered that they were somewhat satisfied with their job before the Covid-19 pandemic hit. The reasons for this include;

- Some elements were quite good but the strategic level they were very unhappy with
- There was a large divide between managers and subordinates
- They wanted a new challenge

- They enjoyed their job but it was not in line with their qualifications
- They are constantly learning
- They enjoyed the hours but found the work extremely difficult
- They received a generous salary
- They felt the job fit their skillset well
- Their work felt very repetitive

A smaller group of respondents answered that, no, they were not satisfied with their job before the Covid-19 pandemic hit. The reasons for this were;

- The hours were not great
- Their commute was too long
- There was an imbalance between their work life and home life
- The job was not massively fulfilling
- There was a negative atmosphere in their workplace
- They were not well paid
- They felt high levels of stress

One of the most frequently seen effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on employees from the expected findings, was psychological distress. With that in mind, respondents were asked how they would describe the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on their mental health. Very few respondents described their mental health as positive. A much higher number of respondents described their mental health as negative. And a large majority of respondents described their mental health as manageable.

Positive Effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic

Despite the obvious disadvantages that the Covid-19 pandemic has brought with it, a number of respondents did report some positive effects. These positive effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on employees are as follows;

- Better communication from their employer
- Support from their employer
- Income support
- Economic boom in the company

- More time to reflect on their work-life balance
- Became closer with their family
- They had more time to themselves as a result of no longer having to commute to work
- More time to study a masters
- The option for a career change
- More time for leisure
- The chance to reassess their entire life
- Changed their outlook on work
- Managed to save money
- Became closer with their neighbours
- They were able to slow down and enjoy the simpler things in life

These positive effects will be considered in greater detail in the discussion section of this research.

Negative Effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic

In addition to the aforementioned positive effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on employees, there were of course also negative effects that were reported. These negative effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on employees are as follows;

- Uncertainty
- Mental health issues
- Seeing the mental health of their loved ones fall
- Unemployment
- Exhaustion
- Loneliness
- Missing family members and friends
- Travel limitations
- Event limitations
- An increase in their workload
- An increase in health measures
- Pressure from their family members
- Missing leisure activities

- A disruptive atmosphere

These negative effects will also be considered in greater detail in the discussion section of this research.

Work During the Covid-19 Pandemic

As has been previously stated, many respondents have stayed working during the Covid-19 pandemic. Out of these respondents who stayed in employment during the Covid-19 pandemic, a majority reported an increase in their workload and responsibilities. A similar amount of respondents considered their responsibilities to be the same as before the Covid-19 pandemic. And, a smaller number of respondents believed that they had seen a decrease in their responsibilities. In addition to this, some respondents cited their workload as being unnecessary as they believed that their roles were not essential enough to be open.

Out of all of the respondents, the majority never left work throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. Out of the respondents who were unemployed as an effect of the Covid-19 pandemic, the majority reported that they already have gone back to work. A fair amount of respondents reported that they have not yet gone back to work.

The respondents who reported that they have already gone back to work agreed to do so under the conditions that;

- They can work from home
- Their restaurant workplace offers only outdoor dining
- There is only a quarter of the normal staff level that is operating
- Their workplace only opens to customers if it is absolutely necessary
- They are offered a full-time contract
- They only have to work part-time
- There are proper extra health precautions
- There is antigen testing of all employees once a week
- The conditions are as close to normal as possible
- Social distancing is practiced

The respondents who never left work or who have since returned to work were asked in what ways their job has changed. The results of this question are as follows;

- An increase in health precautions
- A change in their role responsibilities
- Company downsizing
- Remote working from home
- Less respect for their working hours now that they work from home
- An increase in pressure
- Online meetings and appointments
- Management is more involved in their work
- Their company was sold to its competitor

Respondents' Plans for the Future

In addition to the respondents who never stopped working throughout the Covid-19 pandemic and the respondents who have already gone back to work since, there are also a number of respondents who have not yet gone back to work. All of these respondents would consider going back to work if the proper health precautions were in place, with 1 respondent stating that they would consider going back to work once they feel physically well enough again, after suffering the effects of long term Covid-19. Out of the respondents who have not yet gone back to work, 16 would choose to not go back to their previous job. And, 20 respondents would consider finding a new job.

Summary of Findings

This research has found a number of insights regarding the attitudes and experiences of employees during the Covid-19 pandemic. A look into the reasons why respondents have or have not stayed in employment has been seen, as well as the relevant areas of essential work, and whether or not respondents were satisfied with their jobs before the Covid-19 pandemic hit. The mental health of many respondents was also impacted. Various positive and negative impacts were reported. The respondents who had gone back to work or had worked constantly throughout the Covid-19 pandemic experienced workload and responsibility changes

in their jobs. And, the respondents who had not yet gone back to work revealed their plans for the future. A number of insightful results have come to light regarding the Covid-19 pandemic and the experiences of employees. These findings will now be analysed in greater detail in the discussion section.

Discussion

Discussion of Findings

This section will discuss in detail the results that have been analysed in the previous section. The results of this current study will be compared to, as well as contrasted with, the results of the research that has been previously analysed in the literature review section. Firstly, the issues that are common to both the results of the literature review works and the results of this current study will be examined. Next, the issues that are not common to both the results of the literature review works and the results of this current study will be looked at. This will be followed by an analysis of any and all other notable points of this research - mainly any positive or neutral effects that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on employees. And finally, the previously established research objectives will be discussed.

Issues That Are Common To Both

A number of insightful findings were discovered while analysing this research. As was expected, issues regarding unemployment, uncertainty, exhaustion, and respondents' mental health were commonly seen throughout.

The respondents who became unemployed as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic did so for various reasons. Some respondents cited personal choice as a factor, they did not feel safe continuing to work under the potentially dangerous circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic, and therefore chose to become unemployed. Other respondents of this study became unemployed on the basis that their job was not considered essential. Many respondents reported being laid off by their employer - some were laid off temporarily and others were laid off permanently. These permanently laid off respondents cited the reasons for their termination as a result of

company downsizing due to the Covid-19 pandemic. A handful of respondents reported becoming unemployed as a direct result of catching the Covid-19 virus. With many of these respondents suffering the long term effects of Covid-19.

In addition to unemployment, uncertainty was an issue which was also seen in both the literature review studies and this current one. A number of factors surround this issue. One respondent states that they were only employed on an emergency basis, and constantly wonder if their employment will last. Worries about becoming unemployed due to company downsizing are prominent in the minds of many respondents. The uncertainty of the Covid-19 pandemic has affected many respondents in the workplace also; the fear of catching the Covid-19 virus has affected respondents' concentration levels and has negatively affected the entire atmosphere of the workplace.

Exhaustion is another issue which was recorded in both the literature review and this current study. A number of respondents noticed a significant increase in their workload or responsibility levels following the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. Out of the respondents who worked remotely, it was reported that there were instances of little to no respect for their working hours. A respondent who worked from home claimed that their employer would assign them tasks to be completed outside of their working hours, in addition to their staple workload. Many respondents found that psychological distress, mainly anxiety, depression and stress would contribute to their feelings of both physical and mental exhaustion.

Finally, many cases of mental health issues were reported. As has been seen in the literature review, psychological distress was prominent amongst employees working during the Covid-19 pandemic. These issues included anxiety, depression, stress, and panic. Although a percentage of respondents found their mental health to be manageable throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, many respondents struggled. Many respondents found that the loneliness of social distancing and self isolating took a toll on their mental health. An increase in work responsibilities became too much for some respondents, often overwhelming them. These factors coupled with the fear of catching the Covid-19 virus led to reports of a particularly negative atmosphere in the

workplace. All of these issues contributed significantly to a rise in mental health struggles.

This study found a number of issues that were prominent both in itself and the previously examined literature. However, this study also found a large number of issues which were not common to the literature.

Issues That Are Not Common To Both

The aforementioned issues which were found in the results of this current study, but were not seen in the results of the reviewed literature, include; seeing the mental health of loved ones fall, loneliness, missing family members and friends, travel limitations, event limitations, an increase in health measures, pressure from family members, inability for all leisure activities, and the creation of a disruptive atmosphere.

Many respondents reported that their own mental health had suffered at the hands of the Covid-19 pandemic. But, many reported that their friends or family had struggled with their mental health also. Seeing their loved ones suffer from anxiety and depression very negatively affected these respondents - making them feel helpless in the situation.

Loneliness was another issue which many respondents reported. The encouragement of social distancing and self isolation, as well as many cases of remote working naturally contributed to extreme cases of loneliness. Many respondents reported severely missing their family members and friends.

The limitations which have been placed on respondents have been hugely influential on their lives. In particular, the travel limitations that have been put in place have caused some amounts of stress. One respondent cited that their erasmus year of studying abroad had been cancelled. In addition to these travel limitations, there were also reports of event limitations emerging as a prominent negative effect. With many cases of respondents not being allowed to attend weddings, funerals, parties, or other large events.

Another negative effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on employees was the increase in health measures - particularly in the workplace. Many respondents found these practices stressful, and felt that it added to the fear of the Covid-19 virus itself. This contributed to the creation of a rather negative atmosphere in the workplace. In addition to the increased health measures in the workplace, respondents also reported that the increased health measures in their places of leisure were negative. A number of respondents claimed that their daily routines were affected with the limitations on or the closures of gyms.

Finally, the results of this study found that a disruptive atmosphere had emerged in the homes of many respondents. These respondents reported that living in isolation with their families or roommates often created tense situations. Many respondents felt that they could not function properly with frequent fall-outs between themselves and their family members. This constant pressure resulted in the creation of a fairly disruptive atmosphere in the home.

The results of this study show many insights into the negative effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on employees. However, there were a couple of expected results seen in the examined literature which were not seen in the results of this current study. This study did not find any cases of employee disengagement in the workplace, or respondents' concerns regarding social gaze.

Other Points of Note

There were a number of other results from this study which exhibited more positive or neutral effects on the respondents. These effects include; receiving better communication from their employer, receiving support from their employer, receiving income support, an economic boom in the company, having more time to reflect on a work-life balance, having the chance to reassess their entire life, having more time as a result of no longer having to commute to work, having more time for leisure, having time to study for a masters, becoming closer with family members, becoming closer with neighbours, and having the option to change careers, having a changed outlook on work, saving money, and being able to slow down and actually enjoy life.

A high amount of respondents felt that the communication levels from their employer had risen as a direct result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The uncertainty of the situation forced employers to sit down and properly engage with their employees. This act positively impacted many respondents, who felt valued and supported by their employers.

The distribution of income support was another point of note. Many individuals claimed the PUP and TWSS during the Covid-19 pandemic. Although this was not at all an ideal situation, it helped many individuals during periods of unemployment. And, the respondents who were recipients of these supports felt that they had not been completely forgotten by the state.

In a direct contrast to the previous point, many respondents experienced one or more periods of economic boom in their workplace. For some companies, such as Amazon or JustEat, business was booming. With social distancing measures put in place, there was a massive surge in online shopping and straight-to-your-door deliveries. The respondents who were employed in these areas of work felt the full advantages of this.

Another frequently seen positive effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on employees was that of time. Various respondents reported that more personal time was a surprising positive aspect of social distancing. Respondents who worked remotely reported having more time to reflect on a work-life balance. And one unemployed respondent claimed that their situation gave them the chance to reassess their entire life. Other respondents stated that no longer having to commute to work allowed them more time for leisure and personal hobbies. Another respondent took advantage of the extra time and began studying for a masters.

The extra time and lockdown periods allowed many respondents the opportunity to become much closer with their family members. Spending so much time in a living space with family members built up a tight support system for one respondent. Family game nights, Zoom meetings, and such reportedly brought everyone together. A number of respondents reported becoming much closer with

their neighbours, stating that they appreciated them a lot more than before the Covid-19 pandemic.

Another reported positive effect included respondents' outlook on work. These respondents took the time to re-examine their career in detail. Some departed with the conclusion that they were happy where they were and appreciated their jobs. Others felt that they needed a complete career change.

In addition to these already mentioned positive points, saving money was another prominent one. Many respondents reported that they had been saving up for any potential travelling opportunities after the Covid-19 pandemic had subsided. One respondent explained that they had saved up enough money from the start of the first lockdown to buy their first car.

The final positive effect that this research found was the slow pace that the Covid-19 pandemic brought. With the closure of many facilities, many people felt that their life had been put on hold. However, a number of respondents felt that this was actually a good thing - allowing them to slow down and actually enjoy life. The previously mentioned family time could be taken, and respondents could focus on themselves and their physical and mental health. This change in pace really allowed respondents to see the bigger picture and appreciate their life.

Objectives of Study

In order to rate the success of this study, the objectives must be examined and answered. The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic have already been categorised into the positive and negative. However, the most common of these effects from each category must also be identified.

Once again, these objectives are;

1. To identify and explore the main effects that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on employees.

2. To identify and explore any positive effects that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on employees.
3. To identify and explore any negative effects that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on employees.
4. To grasp a better understanding of the struggles that employees have experienced throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.
5. To seek what employees plan to do in the future regarding their employment.

Objective 1 is to identify and explore the main effects that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on employees. There were many negative and positive effects found in this study. However, the most frequently seen effects of all include;

- Uncertainty
- Mental health issues
- Unemployment
- Employer communication and support
- Economic boom
- Income support

Objective 2 is to identify and explore any positive effects that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on employees. These positive effects are as follows;

- Employer communication and support
- Economic boom
- Income support
- More time to enjoy life
- Becoming closer with family members
- Becoming closer with neighbours
- Option for a career change
- Saving money
- Change in pace

Objective 3 seeks to identify and explore any negative effects that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on employees. These negative effects are;

- Uncertainty
- Mental health issues

- Unemployment
- Exhaustion
- Loneliness
- Travel limitations
- Event limitations
- Increase in health measures
- Disruptive home atmosphere

Objective 4 aims to get a better understanding of the struggles that employees have experienced throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. These struggles include;

- The uncertainty of being unemployed
- A significant drop in mental health
- An increase in job responsibilities
- The loneliness of self-isolation
- Missing out on family events such as weddings or funerals
- An increase in tension amongst family members

And, objective 5 asks what employees plan to do in the future regarding their employment. These employees planned to;

- Go back to their previous job if the proper health precautions were in place
- Quit their current job
- Find a new job
- Go back to work once they feel physically well enough after suffering from Covid-19

All five of these objectives have been addressed and met. Thus, this research will contribute to helping potential future researchers in understanding the most prominent effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on employees.

Conclusion

Outcome of Study

The purpose of this section is to go over the purpose and findings of this study. The research question and objectives will be evaluated. The research question and objectives allowed for the frame of research to be developed. And, without them this study could not have been efficiently carried out.

Research Objective One: To Identify and Explore the Main Effects That the Covid-19 Pandemic Has Had on Employees

This first objective can be linked to the main research question of this study; ‘What are the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on employees?’ This objective identified the main effects overall, whether they were positive or negative. The most prominent effects amongst employees that were found included; uncertainty, mental health issues, unemployment, employer communication and support, economic boom, and income support.

Research Objective Two: To Identify and Explore Any Positive Effects That the Covid-19 Pandemic Has Had on Employees

This objective focused on just the positive effects on employees, rather than on the main effects overall. These positive effects were; employer communication and support, economic boom, income support, more time to enjoy life, becoming closer with family members, becoming closer with neighbours, option for a career change, saving money, and an overall change in pace.

Research Objective Three: To Identify and Explore Any Negative Effects That the Covid-19 Pandemic Has Had on Employees

Similarly to objective 2, this objective looked only at the negative effects on employees. These negative effects were; uncertainty, mental health issues, unemployment, exhaustion, loneliness, travel limitations, event limitations, increase in health measures, and a disruptive home atmosphere.

Research Objective Four: To Grasp a Better Understanding of the Struggles That Employees Have Experienced Throughout the Covid-19 Pandemic

These struggles that employees have experienced tie in closely with the negative effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. They include; the uncertainty of being unemployed, a significant drop in mental health, an increase in job responsibilities, the loneliness of self-isolation, missing out on family events such as weddings or funerals, and an increase in tension amongst family members.

Research Objective Five: To Seek What Employees Plan to do in the Future Regarding Their Employment

As many negative effects and struggles have resulted from the Covid-19 pandemic, it was important to get a glimpse into the future and find out what employees planned to do next regarding their employment. A number of employees said that they would go back to their previous job if the proper health precautions were in place. Many employees simply stated that they would quit their current job. Others admitted that they were already thinking of finding a new job. And, one employee claimed that they would go back to work once they felt physically well enough after suffering from the long term effects of the Covid-19 virus.

Recommendations for Improvement

All five of these research objectives have been examined and completed to the best of the researchers ability. The question of what are the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on employees has been answered. The results from this study add to an already established knowledge base regarding the Covid-19 pandemic. However, from a critical standpoint, this study could have produced richer results if a longitudinal approach had been adopted. The exploration of a number of the same respondents over a prolonged period of time would allow for clearer and more precise results. In addition to this, a quantitative approach to this topic would be another recommendation for further research. Quantitative data might produce a wider range of results, and would allow for more detailed, accurate results.

Implications of Recommendations

The implementation of a longitudinal or a quantitative approach to this research comes with some implications. A longitudinal study could cause an amount of stress

for both the researcher and the respondents. This is in a sense that conducting any study over a prolonged period of time can be difficult as some respondents may change their minds about participating in the study and decide to drop out. This would cause obvious stress for the researcher, forcing them to find replacement participants. A quantitative approach could potentially cost quite a bit, specifically the use of effective quantitative programming might produce a cost for the researcher to face.

Personal Learning Statement

Due to the reflective nature of this statement, I will continue in the first person pronoun. Over the past year I have learned a great deal of things. Investigating a business issue such as the economic crisis that the Covid-19 pandemic has brought with it has truly opened my eyes. Exploring the experiences of others has put my own experience into perspective, allowing me to fully appreciate all of the good parts of my life. One of these good parts includes the opportunity to actually study a Masters and conduct this research. At the very beginning of this research I was nervous, and quite unsure about how to approach this issue, but the support and guidance from my supervisor really helped me to rise to the challenge. Due to this enriching experience I would feel comfortable investigating other business issues, as well as investigating other aspects of the Covid-19 pandemic. I have gained a great deal of confidence and now truly understand what is involved in the research process. The pursuit of learning is something that I am willing to follow again and again. Therefore this study will conclude with the following quotation.

“Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.”

- W. B. Yeats

Appendices

The Questionnaire Which Was Answered by Participants:

1. What is your gender?

2. What is your age?

3. Which sector you are employed in?

4. Are you employed full-time or part-time?

5. When did you begin working in your current or most recent role?

6. What are your reasons for staying in your current role during the Covid-19 pandemic?

7. If you are considered an essential worker, what area are you employed in?

8. How would you consider your workload / responsibilities during the Covid-19 pandemic?

9. On the basis that you became unemployed during the Covid-19 pandemic, what were the reasons for this?

10. Before the Covid-19 pandemic hit, were you satisfied with your job?

11. Briefly explain the choice you made regarding the above question.
12. If you are currently unemployed, would you consider going back to work?
13. Would you consider going back to your previous job?
14. Would you consider finding a new job?
15. Have you already gone back to work?
16. If yes to above, under what conditions?
17. In what ways has your job changed?
18. How would you describe the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on your mental health?
19. Out of all of the negative effects that the Covid-19 pandemic has brought, which has had the biggest impact on your life?
20. Out of all of the positive effects that the Covid-19 pandemic has brought, if any, which has had the biggest impact on your life?

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