Difficulties in maintaining productivity and engaging teams in home office

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Abstract

Technological advances have allowed for new work concepts, modifying the way communication takes place, through tools, platforms and devices, enabling models such as home office. The difficulties of maintaining productivity and engaging teams in a home office regime is a relevant reality for many organizations today. In this scenario, this research aims to identify the challenges of maintaining productivity and engaging teams in a home office regime. To achieve the proposed objective, an exploratory, descriptive, and quantitative research was carried out, with 37 process managers. With this research, it was concluded that the evolution of home office management is intense, but aspects such as managing the journey, adapting the environment, training the team through the online mode, methods of maintaining commitment, generating networking alternatives and exchange of experiences, can be improved by organizations over time.

Keywords: productivity, engagement, home office, remote management.

Introduction

Debates about the different work relationships in the corporate world have occupied an important place over the years. The concept of work environment has been changing, as well as the way in which communication takes place, following the technological transformation, through tools, platforms and devices that are available to contribute to the composition of new forms of work and communication in organizations.

Among the changes that occur in work models, there is telework, remote work or as it became popular since the beginning of the Coronavirus pandemic: home office. The home office focuses on results and not on the process and is basically characterized by the absence of the employee's physical presence in the corporate environment, thus breaking paradigms related to the development of work within a physical corporate environment, to perform tasks having direct contact with other employees and being managed directly by a leader.

Due to the Coronavirus pandemic, the use of the home office has accelerated in the corporate world, bringing new challenges and opportunities for change, as among the various public measures adopted in relation to this pandemic, there is the measure of social distancing, paralyzing different activities. It is important to emphasize that the home office carried out during the pandemic is carried out in an atypical

situation and, for this reason, many aspects of the experiences tend to be intensified, especially on the negative side.

Given the need to understand the obstacles encountered in using home office, this study aimed to identify the challenges of maintaining productivity and team engagement, in order to answer the following question: What are the difficulties in maintaining productivity and engaging teams at home office?

Theoretical Foundation Reference

Productivity

The productivity of an organization is intrinsically linked to the union of technologies, processes, and trained people; therefore, it is closely linked to the performance of its employees, which has as its main factor the ability to obtain an increase in the quantity and quality of the income of its tasks (CARVALHO, 2012).

A productive organization provides engagement, development, as well as respect for its employees, so that they can be productive in any aspect of their lives, thus transforming their employees into partners of the organization in pursuit of its strategic goals (MORAEL, 2013).

Carvalho (2012) highlights that the main causes of a person's low productivity in the workplace can be directly linked to: disliking their work, poor relationship with co-workers, feeling dissatisfied with their remuneration, or not yet find your work useful.

Employee satisfaction is considered essential for organizations known to be successful, because while employees seek motivation, satisfaction and well-being in the workplace, organizations perceive this movement as a source of increased productivity and quality of activities performed (CAMARGO; DALBÓ; NODARI, 2010).

Even if organizations invest in new technologies to facilitate their production or provision of services, the human factor is fundamental to the performance of organizational productivity, thus, engagement can be an aid instrument in the pursuit of people's satisfaction.

Engagement

Engagement refers to the way people relate to something. In the view of Siqueira et al (2014), engagement is a unique mental state for each employee of involvement, interaction, relationship, capable of building bonds, enabling greater development and personal and professional growth, providing positive results both for the employee and the organization.

Bakker (2011) establishes that engagement is the combination of a high level of pleasure at work, which denotes dedication, with a high activation, which means vigor and absorption of activities. With this author's observation, the presence of emotional components to characterize the engagement is perceived.

Schaufeli, Dijkstra and Vasquez (2013) present three particularities (dimensions) that are components of engagement. These are specific positive characteristics, namely: vitality (vigor), dedication and concentration. In this sense, Schaufeli and Salanova (2007) understand these dimensions as follows:

1. Vitality (vigor): high levels of energy and mental resilience, willingness to invest in work and persistence in difficult situations.

2. Dedication: being meaningfully involved in your work and experiencing a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge.

3. Concentration: being completely focused and involved in your work, as time passes quickly, and the individual has difficulty letting go of their work.

Engagement, therefore, is an important element in evaluating the performance of people and teams. It can also mean a difference from current times to identify commitment, dedication, desire to learn and develop, and even trends to stay longer or shorter in an organization. It is linked to happiness and passion for the work done.

Home Office

One of the ways to obtain a better performance with productivity and employee satisfaction is the home office. With the technological revolution, work has undergone new transformations, one of these changes is the popularization of telework – work carried out far from the company's headquarters (TST, 2020). In addition to telework, work done outside the company can be called telecommuting telework or home office (MELLO, 2004). Nowadays, these expressions are considered analogous, and, with the popularization of the model due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was agreed to call home office work outside the employer's premises, thus, in this article, we will preferentially use the term home office.

According to Stümer and Fincato (2020, p. 341) "it is an unequivocally flexible service provision modality: it makes work time and space more flexible in the face of its classic model, coined in the era of the Industrial Revolution".

Recently, the home office has become widespread, due to the pandemic caused by Covid-19, as an alternative for business continuity and job maintenance (STÜMER; FINCATO, 2020). Organizations were suddenly impelled to place most of their employees and home office servers, "not as a planned choice, but as an abrupt imposition in front of the measures of social isolation" (CALDEIRA; DINIZ, 2020, P.1). It is important to emphasize that the home office has been adopted by Brazilian companies some time ago, before Covid-19, there were about 45% of companies that used this kind of work, this means, more than 15 million people worked away from the company before the pandemic (OLIVEIRA NETO, 2020).

According to Wynarczyk and Graham (2013), the home office can be associated with flexibility and balance between work and life, with positive points such as less displacement, reduction of indirect costs, and negative points such as the increase in the real and the difficulty in separating work and personal life. To be successful with the home office, it is essential to achieve quality of life for the individual and efficiency for the organization. Both the worker and the organizations need, among other things, to organize themselves so that there is discipline, provide a physical separation, if possible, as well as an emotional one between the professional and personal spaces, and also carry out constant monitoring by the organization.

Method

To understand the difficulties encountered by managers in maintaining the productivity and engagement of their teams in home office, this research is classified as basic, a type of investigation focused on improving the understanding of a particular phenomenon. Is exploratory, as it is preparatory research

on an underexplored theme seen from a new perspective, which will serve as a basis for further research (CASARIN; CASARIN, 2012), and descriptive because it aims to "identify the factors that determine or contribute to the occurrence of phenomena" (GIL, 1989, p. 46), that is, it seeks to explain the reason and why of things. Using a quantitative approach, with the application of a questionnaire containing 21 statements based on the Likert scale.

The research adopted the bibliographic research and the application of a questionnaire, developed based on the literature. The research subjects are 37 process managers of organizations located in the state of Santa Catarina, south of Brazil, which, due to the pandemic, started to use the home office with their team.

The application of the questionnaire took place after the pre-tests for the improvement of the instrument. Adjustments were made to then start applying the questionnaire through Google Forms. After receiving all the answers, the analysis proceeded through thematic analysis.

Results

For result presentation and analysis, this research is presented in the form of three graphs constituted by the factors: productivity, team engagement and home office, and their respective indicators.

The first factor to be analyzed is productivity and is represented in Figure 1 by the indicators: discipline, organization, increased workflow, time, communication skills, feedback, work environment, distractions, and routine. The "discipline" indicator significantly showed that 35% of managers are indifferent to this issue. Discipline in remote work is essential for positive and productive results, being a daily challenge, mainly due to the flexibility that the home office allows, therefore, it is essential to create a daily habits by the professional that favors discipline, avoiding procrastination, distractions and extended working hours.

In the "organization" indicator, also significantly, 41% of managers indicate indifference to this issue. The organization in the home office is essential for the tasks to be carried out to have good results, as it ensures that you stay focused on your activities. It can be seen in the indicator "increased workflow", that 35% and 16% totally agree and agree, respectively, in relation to the increase in activities because they are at home.

The home office can be exhausting because there is often no discipline, organization of hours and tasks, as workers end up not organizing their time correctly and aligned with the flexibility that work allows, increasing the journey often without having to. In the "time" indicator, as was shown, 32% are indifferent to the issue of time management with their team. When adopting the home office, it is necessary to manage time, as well as the organization of this routine so as not to generate problems. It is important that the professional is prepared to self-manage, being responsible for defining their priorities, understanding their daily production capacity, optimizing processes and their workday.

Observing the indicator "capacity to communication" in Figure 1, it is observed that 54% and 30% totally agree and agree respectively in relation to maintaining contact even with the social isolation caused by the pandemic. Home office tends to social isolation, and due to the Coronavirus pandemic, the use of the home office has accelerated, as among the various public measures adopted in relation to this pandemic,

there is the measure of social distancing, which may affect the ability to communicate and work in a team. In the "feedback" indicator, 27% and 43% totally agree and agree, respectively, in relation to the occurrence of frequent feedback. Feedback is important because it allows a relationship of trust and professional development and can be an ally to the motivation and productivity factor. In the home office regime, the practice of feedback becomes even more important and must be continuous, seeking improvement and increasing employee involvement, satisfaction, and performance.

Within the Productivity factor, the indicator "workplace", also in Figure 1, showed that 8% and 43% totally agree and agree, respectively, in relation to professionals having an adequate environment for the home office. A structured environment for the performance of home office activities is essential for having a reserved, comfortable place, stable internet, and office supplies to perform remote work fluidly and in a healthy way, seeking best practices in the professional's work routine. "Distraction" is also an indicator that impacts the development of home office activities. Figure 1 expressively shows that 49% of managers are indifferent to this issue.

Separating personal and professional life is not an easy task, especially for professionals who carry out their activities remotely. The "routine" indicator showed that 13% and 51% totally agree and agree respectively in relation to their employees having a work routine. Even for the flexibility that the home office offers, having a routine is essential, as the difficulty of establishing a fixed time makes employees spend many hours working, and, colleagues know the time they can contact, if necessary, achievements meetings, sharing knowledge, ensuring balance and interaction with your team (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Productivity
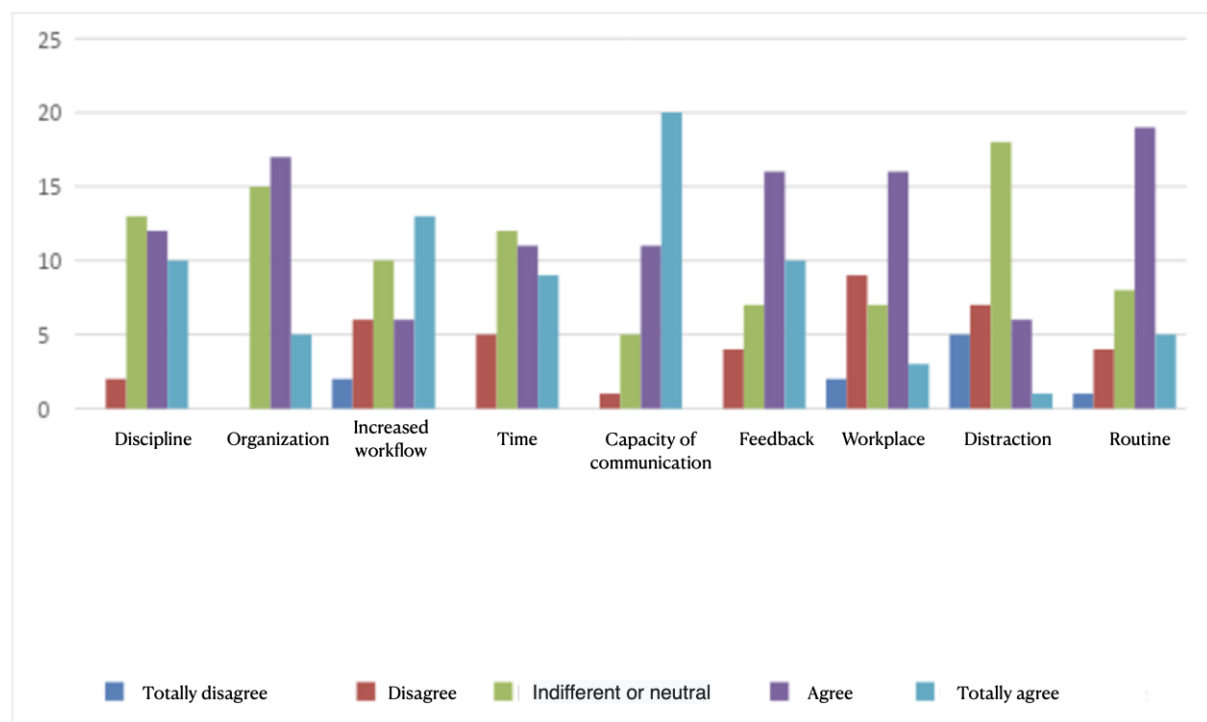
Source: Prepared by the authors (2021).

The second factor to be analyzed is the team engagement, which can be better understood by looking at Figure 2, it is formed by the indicators: teamwork, team integration, online training, team workday, collaboration, online tools and intangible goals.

The indicator "teamwork" has always been a challenge for organizations. In the survey, it showed that 24% and 43% totally agree and agree, respectively, in relation to their team's perception of integration. Because remote work tends to be socially isolated, working in a team becomes a challenge. Thus, managers must pay attention to this weakness of remote work. In the "team integration" indicator, 43% and 30% totally agree and agree respectively, making it an expressive index in relation to team engagement. Engagement generates the feeling of belonging, being a challenge for teams that work at home office because they are far from the corporate work environment.

As can be seen in the indicator "online training" in Figure 2, it was evident that 19% and 32% totally agree and agree, respectively, about to carrying out training even remotely. It is a way to help avoid employee isolation, improve skills, and team integration, seeking to promote closer connections and team development. Another indicator is the "team workday", showing that 46% and 30% totally agree and agree respectively with the team working with compatible hours. By making working hours more flexible, professionals who carry out establish schedules compatible with their team so that they can have integration, communication, knowledge sharing, resulting in greater performance. The "collaboration" indicator showed that 38% and 43% totally agree and agree respectively on the existence of collaboration between employees. Collaboration is important for mutual exchange of cooperation between everyone in the company so that activities flow better, expand social interaction, even remotely, and contribute to achieving a common goal.

It can be seen by observing the indicator "online tools", also in Figure 2, that 57% and 30% of managers totally agree and agree respectively that their team uses digital tools in their remote activities. Technology was responsible for creating remote work, creating tools that make it easier to carry out activities remotely, such as applications and software in carrying out and sharing with others, making the integration and execution of work more practical, accessible, and efficient. The indicator "intangible goals" showed that 14% and 24% totally agree and agree respectively, however, 19% answered that they were indifferent, 19% disagreed and 24% totally disagreed with this question. The acceleration of remote work was latent due to the need for social distancing due to the pandemic, and when making this transition, managers must reanalyze the goals and objectives so that it has tangibility due to the adaptation of the new work regime, as can be seen at Figure 2.

Figure 2

Engagement
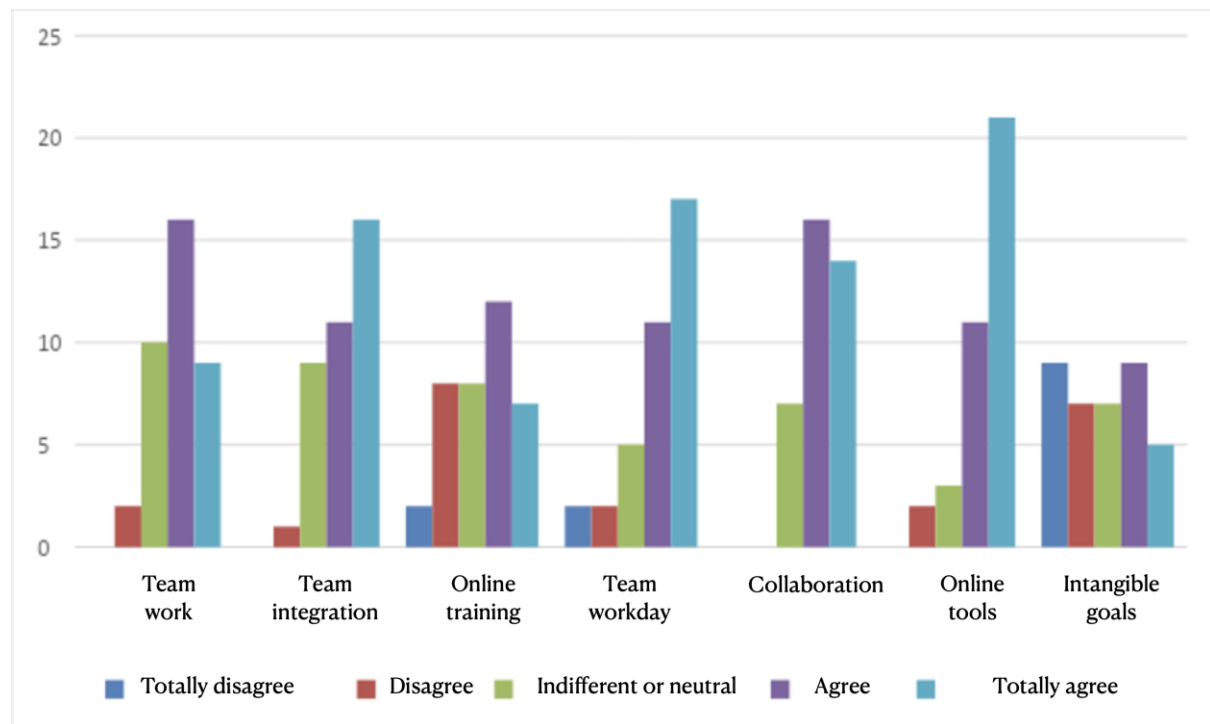
Source: Prepared by the authors (2021).

In the home office factor, the following indicators are observed: commitment, flexible working hours, networking, professional motivation, and remote work culture, represented in Figure 3.

It is noted in the indicator "commitment", that 24% and 35% totally agree and agree respectively that there is the same commitment on the part of employees. The remote work routine can cause some difficulties in adapting and developing activities so that productivity is maintained and achieved, for that, it is essential that there is a lot of discipline, posture, and commitment. In the "flexible working hours" indicator, 32% of managers are indifferent to the question of verifying whether their employees maintain their working hours when performing remote activities.

One of the characteristics of remote work refers to the flexibility of hours, allowing professionals to carry out their activities at their most productive hours, but it is essential that the employee organizes to better take advantage of their productive hours, and determine with the company fixed pre-established hours compatible with the entire team so that there is communication, integration and teamwork with excellence. The indicator "networking" showed that 8% and 46% totally agree and agree respectively on this issue. Networking is a possible barrier for those who work remotely and in segments that are characterized as collaboration and teamwork, this issue becomes an even greater challenge, being necessary to maintain an active contact network in generating well-being, engagement, sharing ideas and information, always maintaining an aligned communication with the entire team.

In the indicator "professional motivation" also shown in Figure 3, it can be observed that 8% and 24% totally agree and agree, respectively, 22% answered that they are indifferent, however, 32% disagree and 14% totally disagree that it is harmful in home office. The lack of sociability, due to the fact of working

remotely, can be harmed, even with several online tools that allow this interaction, as a result, managers have the challenge of developing and motivating their team.

The "home office culture" indicator showed that 13% and 30% totally agree and agree, respectively, 30% answered that they are indifferent, 22% disagree and 5% totally disagree that the company with the adoption of the home office has rethought and restructured its culture, inserting it as a management practice. During the period of social isolation, many organizations started to adopt the home office as an alternative to maintain their business activities, it being essential to strengthen the organization's culture in its employees, maintain it and adapt to the new work regime that was installed, as can be noticed at Figure 3.

Figure 3

Home office factor
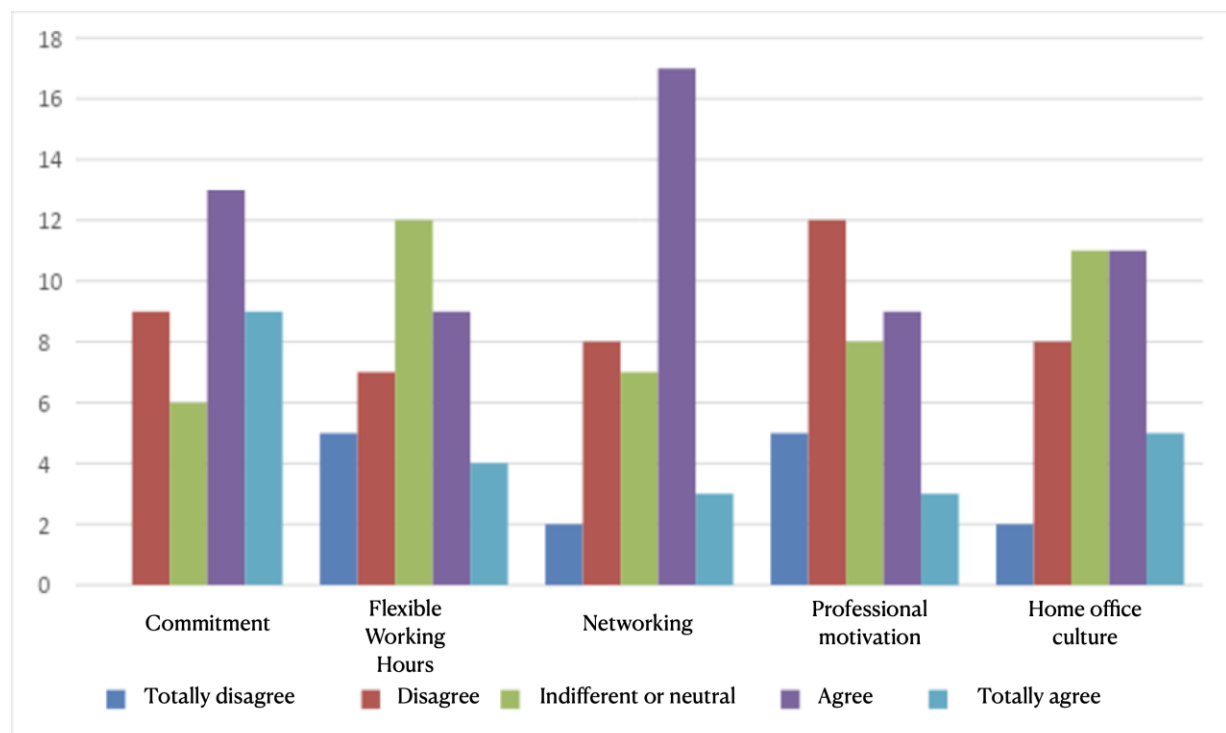
Source: Prepared by the authors (2021).

In summary, managers need to restructure to the "new normal" that Covid-19 designed by implementing remote work, it is essential to maintain the organizational culture with their employees, focus on communication and monitor their team in relation to productivity, satisfaction, motivation, commitment, bringing you closer to the feeling of belonging, keeping the company's culture alive.

Conclusion

This research sought to identify the difficulties in maintaining productivity and engaging teams in a home office regime. Reading the graphs shows that managers still need to develop for this work regime as they suddenly faced the challenge of leading their teams from a distance. Faced with this new reality imposed by the coronavirus, leaders needed to reinvent themselves by adopting the home office, adopting a leadership focused on results and not on the process.

In this perspective, managers need to maintain the productivity and engagement of their team working at a distance in a healthy way, paying attention to competencies that did not need to be so latent before, such as discipline, organization, working hours, an appropriate environment for the home office, training and empowerment, motivation and commitment. A challenge for leaders to rethink their way of managing, seeking to increase productivity, team spirit, motivation of their employees, and keeping the team integrated, connected and engaged.

Thus, it is important to be aware of the necessary competencies that the employee needs to develop their tele activities, such as: productivity, discipline, organization, favorable environment for home office, focus on achieving pre-established goals by the organization, communication skills, engagement, commitment and motivation.

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