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## TELEWORKING AND THE NEW CHALLENGES OF LEADERSHIP IN LABOR RELATIONS: THE CASE OF THE FEDERAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY OF RONDÔNIA

### TELETRABALHO E OS NOVOS DESAFIOS DA LIDERANÇA NAS RELAÇÕES LABORAIS: O CASO DO INSTITUTO FEDERAL DE EDUCAÇÃO, CIÊNCIA E TECNOLOGIA DE RONDÔNIA

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#### **ABSTRACT**

This study addresses the new challenges in the labor relations of teleworking team leaders, bringing the concrete case of the Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology of Rondônia, a federal educational institution. This is a qualitative study, a case study of an applied nature, using the content analysis technique based on the assumptions of Bardin (2011). The results show that teleworking was highly widespread in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and was implemented as a management program at the institution after the legislation was consolidated. It was possible to identify positive and negative points and challenges related to barriers in communication, adaptation, management, systems and cultural aspects. In the end, it was possible to consider that this work practice is still in the adaptation phase, with a need for improvement in order to reduce the challenges encountered, as well as to deepen studies in the area in order to build representative parameters on the subject.

Keyword: Teleworking. Leadership. Public Administration.

#### RESUMO

O presente estudo aborda os novos desafios nas relações laborais de líderes de equipes em teletrabalho, trazendo o caso concreto do Instituto Federal de Educação, Ciência e Tecnologia de Rondônia, uma instituição federal de ensino. Trata-se de pesquisa qualitativa, estudo de caso de natureza aplicada, por meio da técnica de análise do conteúdo realizada com base nos pressupostos de Bardin (2011). Os resultados mostram que o teletrabalho foi altamente difundido no contexto da pandemia do Covid-19 e implementado como programa de gestão na instituição a partir da consolidação da legislação, sendo possível identificar pontos positivos e negativos e desafios relacionados a barreiras na comunicação, adaptação, gerenciamento, sistemas e aspectos culturais. Ao final, foi possível considerar que essa prática laboral ainda está em fase de adaptação, havendo a necessidade de aperfeiçoamento visando diminuir os desafios encontrados, bem como aprofundar os estudos na área a fim de construir parâmetros representativos sobre o tema.

Palavra-Chave: Teletrabalho. Liderança. Administração Pública.

#### 1 INTRODUCTION

Public institutions have undergone constant transformations in their management practices and work dynamics, especially with regard to the use of information and communication technologies within institutional processes, procedures and systems. These changes are the direct result of social, political and economic contexts, leading to significant changes in the structure of these organizations (DIAS; BORGES, 2015).

In this system, it is noteworthy that the growing advance of technology has triggered major transformations on the world stage, bringing up the need to discuss the implementation of teleworking in organizations, its changes in the dynamics of work and the challenges arising from them.

At the national level, this discussion has already been underway for a few years, with various public bodies and institutions considering adopting this type of work, which was imposed in March 2020 across the board, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, for many workers and civil servants.

In order to implement this new way of working, many transformations were and still are necessary for its successful development, reformulating management models from a systemic approach, which do not depend exclusively on instruments and strategies, other elements such as leadership (DIAS; BORGES, 2015) and the specificities arising from it being essential.

Thus, the imposition of teleworking in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, regulated by Provisional Measure No. 927, of March 22, 2020, has led many institutions, such as the Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology of Rondônia - IFRO, to carry out their activities remotely without being prepared to do so, The telework management program was subsequently implemented at the institution, as regulated by Normative Instruction No. 65, of July 30, 2020, which established criteria and procedures to be observed by the bodies and entities that are part of the Civil Personnel System of the Federal Administration - SIPEC regarding the implementation of the Management Program and by Decree No. 11.072, of May 17, 2022, which established the Demand Management Program - PGD of the federal, autarchic and foundational public administration.

From this same perspective, institutions such as the Federal Institute of Santa Catarina - IFSC, the Federal Institute of São Paulo - IFSP, the Federal Institute of Minas Gerais - IFMG, the Federal Institute of Espírito Santo - IFES, the Federal Institute of Goiano, the

Federal Institute of Brasília - IFB, the Federal Institute of Mato Grosso do Sul - IFMS, the Federal Institute of Amapá - IFAP, Instituto Federal de Sergipe - IFS and Universidade Federal Fluminense - UFF, are some examples of educational institutions that, like IFRO, based on the regulations that established the Demand Management Program - PGD in the federal public administration, implemented their own telework management programs after the return of "post-pandemic" face-to-face activities.

The Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology of Rondônia - IFRO, an autarkic entity of the federal public administration, has as its main activity the offer of professional, scientific and technological education, being created through Law No. 11.892, of December 29, 2008, which reorganized the Federal Network of Professional, Scientific and Technological Education through the Technical Schools, Agrotechnics and CEFETs, transforming them into Federal Institutes of Education, Science and Technology.

The institution's main focus is the provision of professional and technological education, while also working comprehensively in basic and higher education, research and the development of products and services with a focus on regional and social development.

The IFRO is currently made up of 11 (eleven) units, of which 09 (nine) are *campuses*, 01 (one) is an advanced campus and 01 (one) is a rectory, distributed throughout various municipalities in the state. It also has 44 (forty-four) distance education (EAD) hubs in partnership with other institutions and 12 (twelve) hubs in partnership with CAPES (UAB) in the respective state, as well as 11 (eleven) hubs in the state of Paraíba, 01 (one) hub in Pernambuco, 02 (two) hubs in Minas Gerais and 01 (one) international hub in Guayaramerín - Bolivia.

In 2020, as a result of the contingency measures imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the institution began to carry out its administrative and teaching activities remotely, and this situation lasted for almost two years, during which time the Telework Management Program was regulated and implemented within the institution, making it possible to carry out some activities, mainly in the administrative area, remotely, even after the return of face-to-face activities was determined.

From this perspective, this study aims to address the challenges faced by teleworking team leaders at one of the institution's *campuses*, *as* well as to identify the positive and negative points of this form of work, in order to obtain representative parameters regarding

teleworking in educational institutions, contributing to the improvement of this form of work and to future research in the area.

#### 2 THEORETICAL ELEMENTS OF THE RESEARCH

Although it seems to be a novelty brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic, teleworking, also popularly known as remote work or *home office*, *has* already been a regulated labor practice in Brazilian labor legislation since 2011, as set out in Law 12.551/2011. However, remote work has existed in the country for a long time, since the 1990s, and has been a reality since then, so that flexible working was perceived as an opportunity to reduce costs and speed up negotiations, but, *contrario sensu*, *it* was seen as a threat to essential work clauses (NOGUEIRA; PATINI, 2012).

In 2020, with the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic, this work practice was widely disseminated throughout the world, in the most diverse activities and public and private institutions, as one of the measures to contain the virus. It is noteworthy that after almost two years of implementing teleworking in Brazil in many public institutions, the feasibility and benefits of developing various work activities remotely were verified, resulting in the publication of Decree No. 11,072 of May 17, 2022, which provided for the Management and Performance Program - PGD of the direct, autarchic and foundational federal public administration, which established guidelines and procedures to be adopted for the implementation of teleworking as a management program.

According to the Decree, the PGD is a management instrument that regulates the development and measurement of the activities carried out by its participants, with a focus on delivering results and the quality of the services provided to society.

With this in mind, one of the PGD's main objectives is to increase the efficiency of public services by establishing management by results as the main factor in evaluating and proving the attendance of teleworkers. Thus, the periodic delivery of demands will prevail and the work regime may be full or partial, observing the need to attend to the public whenever necessary and to attend the unit when called upon by the immediate supervisor. According to the document, there is also provision for increased productivity for those who opt for remote service, as well as the possibility of working in distant geographical locations, including abroad, in the latter case for a limited time and in specific, previously established cases.

According to the aforementioned legislation, it can be seen that the teleworking regime was established in the interests of the public administration, with the aim of increasing results, the efficiency of the public service, savings for the public coffers and quality of life for its employees.

This type of work is characterized by the use of advanced information and communication technologies that allow for the electronic transfer of information, making it possible to communicate the coordination of tasks to workers in various locations and asynchronously (HISLOP; AXTELL; DANIELS, 2009).

In the same vein, Amigoni and Gurvis (2009) point out that the main characteristic of this type of work is that activities are carried out away from the traditional workplace, in a location other than the organization's headquarters, through the use of information and communication technologies.

Despite the use of various terms as synonyms for work carried out outside the institution's physical premises, the International Labor Organization (ILO) has adopted the term *telework*, which brings together concepts of flexible working space and time (ROCHA; AMADOR, 2018), thus adopting this term, which is also used by IFRO to carry out the work activities included in the Management Program.

With regard to the benefits of this working practice, Fujii (2020) states that teleworking can increase employee productivity, which can be seen as motivation. According to Daniels, Lamond and Standen (2001), this type of work has benefits for the worker, such as reduced commuting with a consequent reduction in costs and time savings, flexible working hours, greater autonomy over their work and a better work-life balance. For the organization, the benefits include reduced turnover and greater retention of employees, reduced costs in terms of physical and ergonomic structure, and reduced absence of employees for health and personal reasons. However, the authors stress the need to analyze these benefits in the context of each organization and the nature of the activities carried out, in order to weigh up the existence of possible losses.

One of the highlights of teleworking is the flexibility provided to workers by this type of work, especially with regard to the scope of the workplace, enabling employees to perform their duties anywhere and at any time (MELO, 2018).

In their studies, Vilarinho, Paschoal and Demo (2020) also point out the positive aspects of teleworking, such as the increase in quality of life for teleworkers, who can wear

more informal clothes, reduce the time and cost of commuting to work, have more time available to spend with their families, create environments adapted to their needs, build and organize their own work routine and concentrate better on their tasks, giving them greater autonomy and increasing motivation and productivity. In addition, they point out that there is a tendency towards less time off work due to health problems and the possibility of doing other activities.

Other advantages found in this working practice were improved quality of life, greater balance in the work-family relationship, increased productivity, flexibility of location and timetable, creation of metrics for measuring productivity, reduction of costs, stress, commuting time and exposure to violence, as well as knowledge of work demand. (FILARDI; CASTRO; ZANINI, 2020).

With regard to teleworking in public administration, Goulart (2009) carried out a survey within the Federal Data Processing Service (SERPRO), one of the pioneering bodies in implementing this type of work, and identified an increase in the productivity of employees based on the results delivered, savings in infrastructure and logistics resources and greater satisfaction among the target audience (BERGAMASCHI, NETTO FILHA; ANDRADE, 2018).

Thus, within the scope of the respective body, advantages were identified in adhering to teleworking, such as increased productivity, reduced infrastructure and material costs, greater retention of civil servants, reduced organizational conflicts and fewer unforeseen extreme weather events. However, some disadvantages have also been pointed out, such as the higher cost of recruiting and training staff, the difficulty of interacting and supervising activities and the increased costs of investing in technology and systems development (BERGAMASCHI, NETTO FILHA; ANDRADE, 2018).

However, there are also possible negative aspects to be studied in the practice of teleworking, such as problems relating to technical support, network and software, legislation that is still in the process of being built and adapted to this new reality, communication processes, adapting working hours and ergonomic structure (VILARINHO; PASCHOAL; DEMO, 2020). Despite this, Pojo (2021) argues that technological barriers are one of the least impeding challenges to the implementation of teleworking, given the plethora of cheap and adaptable options.

Another factor to be considered concerns remote management and communication, in which managers are unable to monitor employees' work in the traditional way. However, "modern technology offers the possibility of monitoring employees electronically (for example, their logon/logoff times, pace of work, use of e-mail, telephone calls, among others)." (DACAL; COVA, 2022, p.183). However, according to Hertel, Geister and Konradt (2005), care must be taken when using these methods so that there are no negative effects on employees' lives, such as stress and dissatisfaction.

There are also disadvantages that can occur when using teleworking, such as not adapting to this new working system, lack of communication, loss of ties with the institution, psychological problems, infrastructure and control of the teleworker (FILARDI; CASTRO; ZANINI, 2020).

From this same perspective, authors such as Barros and Silva (2010) emphasize that there is a lack of visibility for teleworkers, as well as pointing out the difficulties encountered by telework team leaders in monitoring the performance of their subordinates, especially with regard to control and evaluation. Groen and Sander (2018) point out that managing a team of teleworkers is one of the major challenges faced by managers, as they are not seen all the time, which brings up issues of monitoring, control and evaluation.

Another common challenge that can be identified in the context of teleworking is the need to create management system models linked to performance and which make it possible to increase the degree of trust between the leader and those being led. In addition, it is necessary to create strategies aimed at minimizing negative points, such as social isolation, lack of face-to-face supervision, lack of information for carrying out activities, specific regulations, data vulnerability, infrastructure in the home environment, avoiding distractions with household chores and the home environment itself (MELO, 2018).

Pojo (2021) also states that one of the main barriers to be overcome when implementing teleworking is the cultural issue, as there are still leaders who hope to return to the "normal world", i.e. adopting the management procedures used before the pandemic, based on presence, command and control. He also points out that, in order to overcome these barriers, it is necessary to invest in leadership training in order to provide knowledge about efficient methods for building high-performance teams.

In this sense, Lewis (2013) highlights the importance of cultural issues for the implementation and effectiveness of teleworking, giving the example of French culture, in

which face-to-face interactions and communications are highly valued, making it more difficult to implement teleworking.

#### 3 METHODOLOGICAL ELEMENTS OF THE RESEARCH

This study analyzes the challenges encountered in managing teleworking, its advantages, disadvantages and peculiarities, focusing on the specific case of one of the campuses of a federal educational institution, which had its first experience with this type of work in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The research, of a qualitative and applied nature, makes use of the case study method, using as a data collection technique documentary analysis of legislation and institutional documents on the subject and semi-structured, in-depth interviews with managers of teleworking teams at the IFRO - Colorado do Oeste *campus*, one of the oldest and largest in territorial extension of the entire institution.

The interviews were carried out with seven people who currently hold management positions in teleworking teams, both full and part time, on the *campus in question*, and with one person who holds a management position in the rectory.

The data collection instruments, as well as the project that gave rise to this article, the result of a master's thesis, were duly submitted to and approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the institution where the research was carried out.

In the course of the data analysis, the interviewees' answers were selected and categorized, enabling better precision of the data in order to carry out the theoretical-empirical confrontation. To analyze the data, the content analysis technique was used, based on the assumptions of Bardin (2011).

#### 4 PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The data presented is the result of a master's research project carried out at the Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology of Rondônia (IFRO) in partnership with the Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRRJ).

Using the proposed methodology and data analysis, the data collected was categorized into three distinct categories regarding teleworking at the institution: positive points, negative points and challenges of teleworking, structured according to Tables 1 to 3:

**Chart** Positive points of teleworking

| Subjects  | Experiences   |
|-----------|---|
| Subject 1 | Organization of the flow, better systematization of processes, with records of what is done, better allocation of demands and a more equitable division of labor.   |
| Subject 2 | Increase in the flow of services provided by the virtual modality, which was not the case before.   |
| Subject 3 | Opportunity to improve quality of life; Improved organization of personal life with work, especially for those caring for children and health issues; Reduced commuting; Keeping people in the institution; Improved concentration to carry out activities; Reorganization of physical spaces, making it possible to optimize spaces and reduce many costs, from the pantry to the coffee served, generating a significant reduction in costs for the administration.   |
| Subject 4 | Considerable cost reduction for the institution; optimization of physical space in the institution; taking advantage of the condition that was imposed through the pandemic in terms of the adequacy and ambience of the services provided, in order to meet the real need for deliveries arising from the sector; better quality of life with optimization of time with mobility; choice of work environment; flexibility of schedules; reduction of transport costs; reduction of risk with displacement; reduction of absenteeism; greater family interaction among others indirectly. |
| Subject 5 | Work is more productive, there aren't as many unnecessary interruptions as when we're 100% face-to-face; flexible working hours, a calmer working environment and increased productivity in the sector.   |
| Subject 6 | You can perform more tasks with greater concentration, without interruptions.   |
| Subject 7 | Quality of life is one of the main points and there has also been an improvement in productivity and efficiency in the provision of services.   |
| Subject 8 | More time with family.  |

Source: Prepared by the author (2023).

With regard to this first category of data, the results presented are in line with the considerations presented in the studies by Fuji (2020), Filardi, Castro and Zanini (2020), Goulart (2009), Bergamaschi, Netto Filha and Andrade (2018), regarding the increase in productivity in this type of work provided by greater concentration and a reduction in interruptions, as can be precisely identified in the statements by subjects 2, 3, 5, 6 and 7.

In addition, the organization of flows and better optimization of processes also deserves to be highlighted, in line with the findings of the studies by Filardi, Castro and Zanini (2020), who mention the creation of metrics to measure productivity as a positive point.

It should also be noted that the reduction in costs for both the employee and the institution appears repeatedly in the interviewees' speeches, confirming the premises presented by authors such as Daniels *et al.* (2001), Vilarinho, Paschoal and Demo (2020) and

Filardi, Castro and Zanini (2020), as well as issues related to flexibility, time with the family and quality of life, pointed out by practically all the authors.

Another point worth highlighting is the finding that teleworking has allowed people to remain at the institution because of the possibility of carrying out their work activities away from the institution's physical location, in addition to identifying a considerable reduction in costs for the institution due to the optimization of physical spaces and infrastructure, which is in line with what has been said by authors such as Daniels *et al.* (2001), Goulart (2009) and Bergamaschi, Netto Filha and Andrade (2018).

Chart 2 Negative points of teleworking

| Subjects  | Experiences  |
|-----------|--|
| Subject 1 | For my sector, teleworking in full mode is detrimental, because I see that the     |
|           | server loses the bond, it seems that the person is not part of that team.          |
| Subject 2 | I see that full teleworking for my sector is detrimental because we have a very    |
|           | large flow of face-to-face service.  |
| Subject 3 | Today, you first have to find out the source of the problem and then set up a      |
|           | meeting, often online, calling the team together to discuss it, and it's different |
|           | having a meeting than an open dialog like in person, in other words, it creates a  |
|           | formality for something that you used to solve over a chat;                        |
|           | The flow of service for me has increased a lot, both in person and on the phone,   |
|           | because before you had to share the phone with several people. Also the            |
|           | distribution of activities, which was more practical on a daily basis.             |
|           | The issue of integrating new employees into the team was a little more difficult.  |
|           | Some people have lost their sense of belonging to the institution.                 |
| Subject 4 | As far as the Coordination Office where I carry out my activities is concerned,    |
|           | we have not identified any negative points with the implementation of              |
|           | teleworking.   |
| Subject 5 | Difficulty in reconciling personal and professional demands and, above all, the    |
|           | fact that we work more, sometimes it's difficult to keep to a schedule, and it     |
|           | happens that we work all three shifts at times of greater demand.                  |
| Subject 6 | The downside is that you lose contact with people.                                 |
| Subject 7 | Dealing with working hours, it was common to see customers on weekends,            |
|           | holidays and at night.   |
| Subject 8 | The downside is the change in routine at home.                                     |

Source: Prepared by the author (2023).

As for the negative points mentioned by the interviewees, factors such as difficulty in team interaction and integration with the consequent loss of a sense of belonging to the institution were also found in the research carried out by Bergamaschi, Netto Filha and Andrade (2018) and Filardi, Castro and Zanini (2020).

In addition, issues related to the communication/socialization process, the distribution and management of activities and the adequacy of schedules/routines were also found, which

is confirmed by the studies carried out by Vilarinho, Paschoal and Demo (2020), Dacal and Cova (2022) and Filardi, Castro and Zanini (2020), as possible negative points caused by teleworking.

Chart 3 Challenges in managing teleworking

| Subjects  | Experiences   |
|-----------|---|
| Subject 1 | Manage the various profiles you have. Making it clear - especially to outsiders - that teleworking is not a day off. One of the great challenges of teleworking is to break down these misconceptions that still exist in the minds of some people, especially those who are not teleworking. I think this is IFRO's great challenge, and perhaps that of public administration as a whole.  I feel that some civil servants still haven't managed to incorporate or don't want to incorporate this self-responsibility for their work.  I see that the big challenge is to overcome these cultures that still exist of the public servant of the past. |
| Subject 2 | Directing the activities was one of the biggest challenges at first.  |
| Subject 3 | The main challenge is the communication process.  |
| Subject 4 | Distribution of tasks to each member of the team, bearing in mind that during the on-site period there was no such division of activities for each server, i.e. all the servers carried out all the activities inherent to the Coordination.  |
| Subject 5 | Showing the team that I'm there if they need me, that the problems that arise can be solved together, even if we're physically far apart.   |
| Subject 6 | Only SUAP (Unified Public Administration System), the system for approving activities, for control, I think it's boring, was the worst.   |
| Subject 7 | Maintaining clear and effective communication with colleagues and superiors, as well as maintaining motivation and focus. Distinguishing working hours, a fact that is easy to control in the face-to-face environment, while in the remote environment, it is mixed with time off and/or weekends, holidays and night time. Productivity control, since it is difficult to measure certain activities and the time taken to carry them out.  |
| Subject 8 | Internet failures.  |

Source: Prepared by the author (2023).

Finally, the main challenges in the management of teleworking were the cultural problem that still exists in relation to this work practice and the consequent lack of visibility of teleworkers, as well as points inherent in the management of activities, institutional systems, the adequacy of working hours/routine and the barriers of technology and communication, This is in line with the findings of authors such as Barros and Silva (2010), Melo (2018) and Pojo (2021), who mention the lack of visibility of teleworkers and the difficulties encountered by team leaders in monitoring, controlling and evaluating their employees, making it difficult to analyze performance.

#### **5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

In order to achieve the general objective of addressing the challenges faced by teleworking team leaders in a federal educational institution, as well as identifying the positive and negative points of this type of work, based on the concepts outlined in this study, it was possible to demonstrate that teleworking, although it has been carried out in some bodies for a long time, gained ground in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, It was then that new regulations on the subject were created within the public administration, allowing various institutions to implement teleworking management programs with well-defined definitions and parameters according to their specificities.

Thus, it was possible to note that several educational institutions have adopted the practice of teleworking, whether partial or full, as is the case of the Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology of Rondônia-IFRO. In this respect, following studies carried out on one of this institution's *campuses* with the managers of teleworking teams, the positive and negative points of this working practice were identified, as well as the main challenges faced,

Positive points included quality of life, flexibility, increased productivity and cost savings for employees and the institution. On the other hand, there were negative points and challenges inherent in the communication process, routine adaptation, organizational culture and lack of visibility for teleworkers.

Thus, this study has raised important questions about teleworking, specifically addressing the case of a federal educational institution, and its relevance lies in deepening knowledge about the process of implementing this new work configuration in the public sphere and its peculiarities, seeking to contribute to its improvement.

However, the propositions put forward here are limited to one specific institution, leaving it as a research suggestion for future work to extend this study to other public institutions, especially with regard to this working practice in educational institutions, in order to build representative parameters of the process of consolidating teleworking, its advantages, disadvantages and challenges to be overcome.

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