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THE ROLE OF INTERNAL COMMUNICATION IN TELEWORKING MANAGEMENT DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS

EL PAPEL DE LA COMUNICACIÓN INTERNA EN LA GESTIÓN DEL TELETRABAJO DURANTE LA CRISIS DE LA COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

Among the changes brought about by the COVID-19 crisis, many of them affect the management of organizations. This is the case of the sudden implementation of teleworking policies, which, together with social distancing measures and periods of confinement, became widespread in the worst period of the pandemic. This research studies the role of internal communication in the management of telework during the Covid-19 crisis through document review and expert interviews. The results indicate that internal communication is a very important element for these policies and that during the pandemic its relevance in keeping employees aligned with the interests of the brands has been highlighted. To execute these policies, organizations have developed new channels, enhanced team cohesion, and fostered empathy from leaders and the separation of work and personal life. Communication with employees is the cornerstone of these telework policies, which require the implementation of strategies and tools to facilitate the well-being and happiness of remote workforces. This paper also incorporates recommendations for internal communication management concerning the new organizational needs arising during this period.

Keywords: Strategic communication; Internal communication; COVID-19; Crisis; Happiness at work; Telework; Organizational happiness; Video conference; wellbeing.

RESUMEN

Entre los cambios que ha traído consigo la crisis de la COVID-19 muchos afectan a la gestión de las organizaciones. Es el caso de la repentina implantación de las políticas de teletrabajo, que con las medidas de distanciamiento social y los periodos de confinamiento se generalizaron en el periodo más crudo de la pandemia. Esta investigación estudia el papel de la comunicación interna en la gestión del teletrabajo durante la crisis de la Covid-19 a través de la revisión documental y de entrevistas a expertos. Los resultados indican que la comunicación interna es un elemento de gran importancia para estas políticas y que durante la pandemia se ha puesto de manifiesto su relevancia para mantener alineados a los trabajadores con los intereses de las marcas. Para ejecutarlas, las organizaciones han desarrollado nuevos canales, potenciado la cohesión de los equipos y fomentado la empatía de los líderes y la separación del tiempo laboral y la vida personal. La comunicación con los empleados resulta la piedra angular de estas políticas de teletrabajo, que requieren de la implementación de estrategias y herramientas para facilitar el bienestar y la felicidad de las plantillas que trabajan en remoto. Este trabajo también incorpora recomendaciones para la gestión de la comunicación interna en relación a las nuevas necesidades organizativas surgidas durante este periodo.

Palabras clave: Comunicación estratégica; Comunicación interna; COVID-19; Crisis; Felicidad laboral; Teletrabajo; Felicidad organizacional; Videoconferencia; *Wellbeing*.

A FUNÇÃO DA COMUNICAÇÃO INTERNA NA GESTÃO DO TELETRABALHO DURANTE A CRISE COVID-19

RESUMO

Dentre as mudanças que a crise do COVID-19 trouxe, muitas afetam a gestão das organizações. É o caso da implementação repentina de políticas de teletrabalho, que com medidas de distanciamiento social e períodos de confinamento se generalizaram no período mais severo da pandemia. Esta pesquisa estuda a função da comunicação interna na gestão do teletrabalho durante a crise do Covid-19 por meio de revisão documental e entrevistas com especialistas. Os resultados indicam que a comunicação interna é um elemento de grande importância para essas políticas e que durante a pandemia ficou clara sua relevância para manter os trabalhadores alinhados aos interesses das marcas. Para executá-los, as organizações desenvolveram novos canais, reforçaram a coesão da equipe e fomentaram a empatia entre os líderes e a separação entre o tempo de trabalho e a vida pessoal. A comunicação com os colaboradores é a pedra angular destas políticas de teletrabalho, que exigem a implementação de estratégias e ferramentas que facilitem o bem-estar e a felicidade dos colaboradores que trabalham remotamente. Este trabalho também incorpora recomendações para a gestão da comunicação interna em relação às novas necessidades organizacionais surgidas neste período.

Palavras chave: Comunicação Interna; Teletrabalho; Crise; COVID-19; Comunicação Estratégica; Felicidade No Trabalho; Bem-Estar; Felicidade Organizacional; Videoconferência.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The appearance of Covid-19 has had a great impact at a global level in such obvious aspects as health indicators (Andrikopoulos and Johnson, 2020), mortality (Michelozzi et al., 2020), and national economies (Baker et al., 2020). But the impact of the crisis at the micro-level has not been minor either, since the distancing and isolation measures had an impact on aspects as disparate as the way of relating to others (Sheth, 2020; Castro-Martínez et al., 2020) or professional life (Vaziri et al., 2020).

In contexts of health crises, strategic communication management is a fundamental tool not only to control infectious outbreaks (World Health Organization [WHO], 2005) but also to manage the population's perception of risk (De Sa et al., 2009) and the feelings (Stajnovic, 2015) that must be faced. In the case of Covid-19, communication becomes even more important when an infodemic situation occurs (Allahverdipour, 2020), for which organizations were forced to reinforce their communication strategies (Castillo-Esparcia et al., 2020) to not lose control in the face of a scenario they had never faced before.

Hence, this research focuses on the importance of corporate communication to face an unexpected crisis that forces companies to adopt unforeseen measures. Specifically, it focuses on the success factor that internal communication supposes regarding the sudden implementation of teleworking during the pandemic.

1.1 Happiness at work and its relationship with internal communication

Economic indicators are usually used as the only aspects to monitor to measure prosperity; however, international organizations such as the UN (2017), the OECD (2020), and the European Commission (2011) have pointed out that other elements should be taken into account, such as well-being or happiness at work, also called HAW (Fisher, 2010; de Waal, 2018; Warr and Nielsen, 2018). It is a situation that is replicated in the business fabric, where a large part of the organizations set their objectives in figures and downplay the value of intangibles such as their workforce. In the world of work, the precariousness and suffering of workers have become a generalized situation (Girard, 2009; Durand, 2000) since psychosocial risks such as stress, anxiety, and occupational diseases have spread to the point of becoming a problem of today's society (Gil-Monte, 2012; Schaufeli and Salanova, 2002).

Keeping in mind the well-being and happiness of the members of an organization is an upward trend (Beau, 2019; Najeh, 2019), although they are policies that are far from being generalized (Dejours, 2020). However, some studies focus on how these policies benefit companies since they promote aspects such as the alignment of the workforce, employer branding, or efficiency (Van Riel, 2012; Tanwar and Prasad, 2016; Cuenca and Verazzi, 2018; Diaz-Soloaga, 2019). One of the most relevant elements in measures to promote well-being and HAW is internal communication (Porath and Spreitzer, 2016; D'Almeida and Libaert, 2018; Castro-Martínez and Díaz-Morilla, 2019), which acts as the axis to achieve loyalty, cohesion, creativity,

innovation, and productivity (Verčič and Vokić, 2017; Lalić et al., 2020; Castro-Martínez and Díaz-Morilla, 2021).

The Covid-19 crisis has highlighted problems related to the world of work, such as conciliation (Duran, 2020) or digital disconnection (Trujillo, 2020), and in many cases, it has also served workers to reorder their priorities (Rodríguez, 2021). This has also happened with teleworking because the communication challenges that teams face are more important than those of face-to-face settings and increase over time due to isolation and separation (Hertel et al., 2005).

1.2 An approach to the concept of teleworking

Teleworking could be defined as a work activity that "combines the use of communication and information technologies -ICT- with the concept of flexibility in terms of the method of organizing work concerning its place and time" (Culqui and González, 2016, p. 96). The technological factor is essential for "the digitization of business processes and work tools"; likewise, "digital video call and meeting apps have facilitated communications between companies, employees, and customers. The implementation of teleworking has made the use of these tools almost mandatory to carry out daily work" (EUDE Digital and Cool Tabs, 2020). For his part, Santillán collects the terms in which the International Labor Organization refers to this type of employment: "teleworking integrated with technology makes this 'job separation' possible, facilitating communication at the different levels of a company" (2020, page 4).

But teleworking goes far beyond the purely technological: "it is defined as a whole new work culture, with its social, political, and ethical-moral effects" (Gálvez and Tirado, 2009, p. 163). It is also "a type of logic or device that resignifies the practices deployed by teleworkers and that lead to the creation of new meanings of professional life and compatibility with domestic, family, and personal life" (Gálvez, 2020, p. 7).

Before the COVID-19 outbreak, "teleworking was barely established in Spain, reaching 6.7% of workers in 2017", while "only 4.9% of collective agreements signed in Spain 2019 included this service provision modality" (Ruiz, 2021, p. 12).

2. OBJECTIVES

This work is part of the field of study of public relations and internal communication (Smith and Mounter, 2008; Welch and Jackson, 2007) as strategic resources (Kitchen and Daly, 2002; Kang and Sung, 2017). It focuses on the Covid-19 crisis and the impact it had on organizations in terms of reorganizing their activities, as in many cases they had to launch remote work programs.

In this sense, the general objective is to determine the role of internal communication concerning the implementation of teleworking during the pandemic. Additionally, as secondary objectives, the following are established: analyze the importance of internal communication as support for teleworking; describe the strategies used by organizations to communicate with their staff while working away

from corporate headquarters; identify if there is a relationship between internal communication and the satisfaction of the staff regarding teleworking.

3. METHODOLOGY

It is descriptive research whose methodological design is configured under a qualitative approach that applies two tools for data collection. First, an exhaustive documentary review of professional, institutional, and academic material published on teleworking practices during the pandemic is carried out.

Second, semi-structured interviews are conducted with experts in internal communication and organizational and business management. The profile of these 5 experts is distributed among researchers and academics, communication and public relations consultants, dircoms, and corporate managers. The interviews were conducted by telematic means during January and February 2022. The questionnaires were structured in several blocks and addressed topics such as the management of internal communication regarding teleworking, the most appropriate tools in this context, the effect they can have on the commitment, happiness, and well-being of the staff, or recommendations for their implementation.

4. RESULTS

Teleworking, in the stage before the pandemic, was characterized by its poor implementation: "many companies were reluctant to incorporate teleworking as required by the pandemic for fear of losing commitment, internal culture, and not being able to offer the technological infrastructure for its correct implementation" (expert 2, personal communication, January 15th, 2022).

But the epidemiological situation forced companies to transition their work routines to the virtual environment: "it has been an 'adaptation tsunami' in every way, because from one day to the next we had to learn about technological platforms and tools to develop our activities" (expert 5, personal communication, February 10th, 2022). In this transition, internal communication "was a fundamental part of the organizations to accompany the adaptation process of each collaborator and understand that each one lives a different reality" (expert 4, personal communication, February 7th, 2022). This process, which has been rushed in many cases, has not been exempt from difficulties that are still being resolved: "the costs of the internal leadership crisis and the lack of an organized communicative routine are being addressed because they emerged from this new work culture" (expert 2, personal communication, January 15th, 2022). However, these obstacles do not seem to be a brake on the expansion of teleworking: "every day I hear more that companies, especially large corporations, (...) send their executives to work from home" (expert 1, personal communication, February 1st, 2022).

In Spain, with confinement and "the recommendation to give priority, whenever the situation allows it, to the organizational form of service provision called teleworking and/or remote work (Royal Decree Law 463/2020, of March 14th)" (Ruiz, 2021, p. 11), teleworking figures increased exponentially: "while 24.2% of men have started teleworking due to the pandemic, this figure rises to 37.3% for women" (Rimbau-

Gilabert, 2020, p. 1). But the hasty way in which teleworking was implemented during this crisis "has been devoid of a clear regulatory framework that set conditions related to the provision of services in a modernizing organizational modality and for which neither the company nor the people were adapted" (Ruiz, 2021, p. 16). According to the OECD (2021), at a global level the rate of teleworking increased, although with differences by country, sector, and type of company (table 1). The profile of teleworkers is that of "people between 35 and 65 years old and workers with university education"; however, "an analysis of the intrinsic characteristics of each occupation allows us to estimate that 30% of employed persons could telecommute, at least occasionally, so there is still a wide margin for improvement in the use of this type of work" (Anghel et al., 2020, p.0). Likewise, it highlights "the internal homogeneity of this category of workers in terms of educational level and occupational composition" (Brussevich et al., 2020; Gottlieb et al., 2020; Di Pasquale et al., 2021, p. 56).

Table 1.

Data on the implementation of teleworking during the COVID-19 crisis

Teleworking during COVID-19
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In Australia, France, and the UK, 47% of employees telecommuted during lockdowns in 2020. In Japan, where there was no national lockdown, telecommuting increased from 10% to 28% between December 2019 and May 2020. - The highest rates of telecommuting, close to 50%, occurred in highly digitized industries and financial services. - Large companies opted for telecommuting more than small organizations. - The most qualified workers were more likely to telecommute. In the US, employees with a master's degree or Ph.D. teleworked 15 times more than those with less education. - In most countries, telecommuting rates were much higher for women, with smaller differences in Denmark, Sweden, and the UK.

Source: OECD (2021, p. 1)

The main advantages of teleworking (Ministry of Economy, Innovation, and Science, Andalusian Board, 2010) consist of increased productivity, rationalization of work by setting goals by objectives, and greater conciliation, flexibility, and self-planning; however, it also carries risks: lack of communication with peers and mutual learning, the danger of isolation, greater availability, self-exploitation, and difficulty in separating work and private life. Among the positive effects of teleworking, "it is generating other business paradigms and even benefiting rural areas and people who, due to their personal circumstances, would have difficult access to a face-to-face job" (Ruiz, 2021, p. 17). In the same way, "workers in organizations that favor integration between work and family life have more job satisfaction and higher levels of physical and emotional well-being" (Paris, 2011, p. 75).

This fact has been corroborated by the experts consulted, who point out in the opinions collected that: "now, the perceived benefits of teleworking are high, especially because they have largely overcome the large volume of work (from the start of the pandemic) and a little more time available is started to be enjoyed" (expert 3, personal communication, February 9th, 2022). Other advantages of teleworking have been that "significant savings have been achieved (less mobility

and expenses), besides the fact that self-learning and self-management have been substantial elements for meeting objectives" (expert 5, personal communication, February 10th, 2022).

However, opinions about telecommuting also contain a significant gender bias. Several conditions affect the positive expectations that women have in the face of this reality: "the age of the children, the work of their partners, certain personality characteristics, and the relationship with peers and superiors, play a fundamental role in the job satisfaction they expected when choosing teleworking to reconcile their roles" (Paris, 2011, p. 75). The pandemic has not come to improve the situation of women in teleworking since gender inequalities have been accentuated (Di Pasquale et al., 2021). In this regard, experts express different opinions. The most flattering, believe that teleworking "made there be more collaboration between father and mother regarding the care and attention of children. It cannot be generalized, but it brought fathers closer to the reality of home and child care" (expert 2, personal communication, January 15th, 2022); likewise, some acknowledge that teleworking "can directly affect the performance and professional growth" of women and that, to avoid it, "the belief that household responsibilities are and should be fully shared must be strengthened" (expert 3, communication staff, February 9th, 2022).

Besides all this, it is important to point out that the new labor paradigm, which emerged as a result of technological evolution and was precipitated by the pandemic, has forced companies to "reorder the conception of many situations. We understood and value aspects that we did not consider before. The pandemic generated the restructuring of the corporate world" (expert 4, personal communication, February 7th, 2022). This is because "it is not only about an evolution in the field of technological media but also about the people who are part of it, and this is precisely where the greatest challenge lies" (Berceruelo, 2020, p. 107).

This process "encompasses innovation in business models, optimization of training, and qualification of human resources"; In the same way, "the optimization of the flow of materials when operating by processes and not by functions, the optimization of information flow, and more importantly, the transformation of data into knowledge" (Díaz and Ramírez, 2020, p. 1).

This crisis has revealed other interesting aspects in terms of workflows and relationships with the business environment: "they relied on the goodwill of their collaborators, and there they noticed whether or not there was engagement" (expert 2, personal communication, January 15th, 2022). As for the staff, "at first there was a lot of uncertainty about their work, their activities, roles, processes. Then for the future of that activity in their company or of the company in the market. Then came a slow but incremental adaptation process" (expert 3, personal communication, February 9th, 2022). For clients, on the other hand, this transformation has been even more complicated: "the feeling they expressed having lost sight of and control over their collaborators from one week to the next and not having reliable digital tools to do that control" (expert 3, personal communication, February 9th, 2022).

The benefits of teleworking depend on the autonomy available to the staff but they must start from "a culture of trust and compassion, two key traits that leaders must develop" (Bérestégui, 2021, p. 1). In this sense, it should be noted that the use of remote employee supervision and control software can be counterproductive as it has a negative impact and a loss of trust in management by the workforce (McParland and Connolly, 2020).

For some employees, working from home during the pandemic produced an increase in their satisfaction and productivity (Fana et al., 2020); however, among the psychosocial consequences of this modality, it stands out that it weakens social ties and isolates people in their private spaces. Indeed, teleworking exalts individualities and spreads the message that success depends on oneself and on the ability to produce in any socio-psycho-labor and environmental condition (Bard Wigdor and Bonavitta, 2021, p.18).

These authors mention as another transformation caused by this work modality "the management of workers' time, producing an effect of blurring the time limits dedicated to working and promoting a permanent and constant working day" (Bard Wigdor and Bonavitta, 2021, p. 18). In fact, "there is a very important reason to consider work-family conflict as a relevant occupational psychosocial risk and with marked repercussions: both occupy central elements of the identity of the current person and mainly occupy the use of available time" (Moreno and Báez, 2010, p. 45). The experts focus on these risks: "the number of hours dedicated to work, inequity in work-life balance, connection cuts (...), cuts between one meeting and the next to avoid burnouts" (expert 2, personal communication, January 15th, 2022). Others consider that "not all roles can enjoy teleworking. It is not for all personalities. (...) Use of the worker's own resources, without being acknowledged in many cases" (expert 3, personal communication, February 9th, 2022). It is highlighted that there is still a certain attachment to face-to-face working in some sectors of the workforce: "some (...) have said that they miss being close to people and interacting" (expert 1, personal communication, February 1st, 2022). To nuance these pernicious effects of teleworking, a series of recommendations are proposed (table 2):

Table 2.
Recommendations to mitigate the effects of teleworking

Proposals to implement teleworking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limitation of the demands of the workload, its intensity, and the time to carry it out, especially in projects by objectives. Peak workloads and rest breaks must be managed and taken into account. - That the rules of the normative game mark when and how teleworking can be done. Transparency in teleworking conditions. Coworkers and superiors are asked to have clear information about telecommuting schedules. - Trust of superiors in teleworking as a form of work organization. - Give meaning to tasks so that employees perceive the usefulness, value, and content of their work: balance in the assignment and recognition of tasks carried out remotely, which have the same value as face-to-face tasks, communicating the usefulness of the accomplished tasks. - Generate a change management plan to facilitate the implementation of teleworking that includes training for managers and middle managers to ensure proper leadership, supervision, and support of the workforce. - Promote the time and spatial organization of the staff and promote self-discipline to comply with

that organization to avoid interference between work and personal matters.

- Avoid the appearance of insecurities and demotivation in the workforce by promoting continuous contact and acknowledgment, as well as establishing fair conditions regarding the real work that each one performs in terms not only of economic remuneration but also of aspects such as the schedule, the workload, location, or advancement opportunities, just as you would in a face-to-face work environment.
- The organization must ensure that they have an adequate workspace at home and all the necessary technical and technological requirements.
- That men and women take advantage of teleworking equally.
- That the different levels of the organization take advantage of the teleworking modality.

Source: Pérez and Gálvez (2009, pp. 74-75), ILO (2020a), Mutua Universal (2020, pp. 23-25), and Shipman et al. (2021).

From this perspective, the ILO (2011) points out the ability to manage communication as one of the keys to increasing the success of teleworking, which is why, during the COVID-19 crisis, employers have enhanced interactions with their staff. According to data from WorldatWork (2020), 88% have increased information on health and safety, 84% have advised on working from home, and 76% on remote staff management. Furthermore, many companies have insisted on creating occasions to achieve informal connections between their members, usually extending previous practices -such as online social interactions, online activities for the children of colleagues, or inquiring about the personal situation of peers-, and thus reduce isolation and anxiety (ILO, 2020b).

In the configuration of formal corporate communications, two levels must be taken into account (Mutua Universal, 2020, p. 23-25): the general formal of the organization towards all its internal audiences, whether they telework or not, and that of the direct supervision, which should focus on leadership support and trust with middle managers. The person who exercises this role must act as promoter, coordinator, facilitator, and leader.

The experts point out that internal communication must be managed with "flexibility, empathy, listening to clients, and collaborators, readapting or reinventing the Human Resources department" (expert 1, personal communication, February 1st, 2022). Similarly, they believe that it should: make the tools known, be attentive to the new skills that must be developed, listen in a transitional period, focus on not losing culture despite the distance, be very clear in terms of focuses (business objectives) so that employees do not lose their way, be orderly in terms of communications (less is more because communication channels have been reduced). Be attentive to the indicators (participation, productivity, absenteeism, etc.) and act accordingly (expert 2, personal communication, January 15th, 2022).

They also recommend "the generation of digital communication spaces that guarantee relationships, feedback, and collaborative and team work" (expert 3, personal communication, February 9th, 2022) using "digital, collaborative tools (...), those that allow them to access new knowledge of immediate application" (expert 2, personal communication, January 15th, 2022).

In this sense, those responsible for internal communication must "maintain direct communication with management, change the employee experience, or rethink it"

(expert 1, personal communication, February 1st, 2022), as well as "create spaces that integrate our work teams with a unifying view of the pillars of the organizational culture and offer the best experiences so that employees feel committed" (expert 4, personal communication, February 7th, 2022). Lastly, the training aspect seems fundamental for its improvement: "training in communication, mainly for leaders, strengthens internal communication" (expert 3, personal communication, February 9th, 2022). Thus, managers play a key role "in guaranteeing the psychological well-being of workers by regularly communicating the current situation of the organization, salary projections, incentives, and employment conditions" (ILO, 2020a, p.22).

For all these reasons, content, frequency, and format are important in the design of communications, and each organization must find the mechanisms that best suit their teams (table 3). In general, using informal video calls during the pandemic combined with "virtual coffee breaks, lunches, or activities to exchange experiences between teams has shown a positive effect on the well-being of workers, their sense of belonging to the organization, and mutual trust" (ILO, 2020a, p.22).

Table 3.

Internal communication techniques and tools to promote teleworking

Techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establish a remotely accessible centralized file with all the information on internal policies and processes of the organization. - Generate a system to manage the emotional and support demands to communicate with colleagues and supervisors directly. - Consolidate mechanisms for transparent reinforcement and acknowledgment of work. - Devise channels to exchange meaningful feedback and ideas with co-workers and supervisors. - Facilitate participation in planning, goal-setting, and decision making. - Ensure the autonomy and control of the staff over their own work in a context of great flexibility.
Tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Frequent virtual meetings using an image where possible. - Weekly public meetings where managers communicate updates and answer questions from the workforce. - Contests and initiatives to bring collaborators closer. - Programs to connect the members of the organization such as Skype, Gotomeeting, Teams, Zoom, Slack, instant messaging, internal social networks... - Online training resources. - Subsidies and costing of expenses derived from teleworking.

Source: Eurofound (2020), ILO (2020b), Fana et al. (2020), and Budacia and Busuioc (2021)

Currently, there are a series of recommendations in strategic terms for the management of internal communication concerning teleworking (ILO, 2020a; Mutua Universal, 2020; OIT, 2020b; Horlait and Lambotte, 2021) and among them are:

- Clarify the role of employees and the expectations from them to avoid conflicts arising from a lack of dialogue.
- Explain the rules on communication in the virtual context, which may include indications on response times, length and level of detail of messages, tone and style of writing, or permissibility and use of humor to avoid misunderstandings.

- Inform about the ascending communication channels and the best method and schedule to use each of them according to the priority and urgency of the situation to be addressed.
- Incorporate social aspects of work into communication to continue the bonds and interactions that occurred in the conventional space in the online environment, but fit these proposals into the formal work schedule so as not to interfere with personal time.
- Offer different communication tools and allow staff to use the ones that best suit their preferences and needs.
- Detect biases in communication processes to improve the reception of messages and team interaction. Thus, it is necessary to identify the frequency and quality of communication or its absence between members of the organization.
- Build a support and listening network so that leaders can show their empathy, recognize stress, and that the staff feels free to express their concerns and difficulties.

Regarding the level of loyalty, commitment, and well-being of the workforce, "the pandemic gave us a different picture, which made us rethink many things personally and professionally" (expert 1, personal communication, February 1st, 2022). The experts believe that "hybrid models (face-to-face work and telework) allow the workforce a choice, which was not an option before, so there is an impact on happiness" (expert 2, personal communication, January 15th, 2022). But this impact on the level of happiness at work will occur "to the extent that organizations establish institutional policies to generate conditions of respect and trust among their staff"; Thus, "it would be possible to create better work environments and contribute to a climate of happiness" (expert 5, personal communication, February 10th, 2022). The role of internal communication as part of the corporate culture is essential in building trust in remote environments through various strategies (table 4) since it has been proven that employers who have communicated quickly, clearly, and openly to employees the processes and possible risks of the pandemic, and have supported them in all aspects of teleworking, have benefited from a highly motivated workforce, a higher level of trust, and a positive effect on the organizational culture in the long term. Trust holds all aspects of telecommuting together. (...) Teleworking cannot be effective without it (ILO, 2020a, p.21).

However, in cases in which teleworking has led to an increase in responsibilities, there was not an adequate environment for professional activity, and the company has not provided tools to develop it, the levels of happiness at work have been negatively affected (de los Ángeles et al., 2021).

Table 4.

Recommendations to maintain trust in periods of teleworking

Trust-building strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Employees must have the freedom and autonomy to make decisions without necessarily involving many colleagues and without fear of retaliation despite possible mistakes. - Avoid micro-management of processes by clarifying from the beginning what is expected and within what period from each member of the organization. - Strengthen the culture and encourage employees to be brand ambassadors through the

organization of recreational events.

- Contribute to the online maintenance of informal structures such as resource or affinity groups for employees.
- Establish clear and precise communication channels that allow feedback and active listening.
- Use senior managers as real models of trust and empathy.

Source: ILO (2020a, p.21-22), Tavares et al. (2021), and Santana (2021)

Although a majority of organizations and individuals expect increased use after the pandemic, “relatively few employees are likely to telecommute full-time in the future” (OECD, 2021, p. 1). However, “it seems that it is a model that will not only remain but will increase and be subject to improvement in collective bargaining” (Ruiz, 2021, p. 16). And it is that “both climate change and the possibility of repetition of pandemic phenomena lurk in the future” (Díaz and Ramírez, 2020, p. 5). In this sense, the progressive establishment of teleworking in a majority way is also predicted by the experts:

It (the pandemic) definitely accelerated something that was inevitable. Teleworking, to a greater or lesser extent, is here to stay. Corporate surveys indicate that 50% of the workforce, on average, prefer telecommuting. Generational, family, and infrastructural conditions mean that some prefer teleworking and others do not, but with 50% of the workforce outside the offices, the reality of face-to-face work is highly modified. And with this, the development of new leadership skills (expert 2, personal communication, January 15th, 2022).

However, it is also acknowledged that in some sectors and tasks the implementation will be more complicated: “factories or other types of organizations with direct physical work require attendance, even in support processes, some strategic ones, etc.” (expert 3, personal communication, February 9th, 2022). Likewise, “it is more difficult in those companies that have production, in which operators have to be at the foot of the machine and do not have as many technological skills” (expert 2, personal communication, January 15th, 2022).

According to data from the European Commission (2020), in normal times teleworking can even improve productivity besides facilitating conciliation, but during the pandemic, the quality of work could be affected in many cases by the lack of childcare, inadequate spaces, and ICT tools. And it is that for Eurofound (2020) the design of teleworking must contemplate the risks that it implies for the mental and physical well-being of workers, not only in terms of stress and other health problems but regarding the new phenomenon of virtual presenteeism, that is, working from home when sick. For this reason, in the future “policies to support the transition to remote work will have to carefully consider the potential benefits and costs for productivity, job quality, work-life balance, and the mental health of workers” (European Commission, 2020, p.8).

5. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The experience with teleworking as a result of the COVID-19 crisis has not only increased its implementation but has also changed the perspective on its use since forecasts indicate that both workers and organizations are more favorable to its

maintenance after the pandemic (Smith, 2020). The perceived levels of productivity in remote environments "appear to be strongly associated with the desire to work from home" (OECD, 2021, p. 1), so it is relevant to motivate staff in this regard if teleworking policies are to be implemented (Dias et al., 2022). In agreement with previous studies (Roig and Pineda, 2020; Pons, 2021), aspects such as recommending the workforce to separate teleworking time from personal time to facilitate conciliation and digital disconnection or foster communication and trust are essential. Maintaining a credible dialogic communication strategy with the public through digital media has been essential during the pandemic, although, in line with other research (Camilleri, 2021), there is still a large improvement margin for organizations.

In this sense, it can be affirmed that this work has achieved its objectives by determining the role of internal communication regarding the implementation of teleworking during the pandemic. After analyzing the importance of internal communication as support for teleworking, it is concluded that its proper management is a key factor in the success of remote work since direct information and transparency maintain the alignment of the workforce with corporate objectives. It is necessary to structure regular communications to maintain the commitment and the feeling of belonging, as well as the mutual trust that must be nurtured despite the physical distance and the unstable situation.

Workers must perceive that their supervisors care about them personally to fuel brand commitment but also that they can maintain ties with their peers to maintain trust and social support. Thus, the organization must establish mechanisms for its members to communicate and coordinate with each other downwards, upwards, and horizontally, so that they can cooperate and share informal and playful aspects through collective activities and celebrations that maintain cohesion and a sense of belonging.

This research also collects the strategies used by organizations to communicate with their staff in this context, among which the creation of new channels, the work of team cohesion, the promotion of empathy, and the separation of working time and personal life stand out. On the other hand, the relationship between internal communication and the satisfaction of the staff in terms of teleworking is identified. To achieve this, besides good quality job conditions, it is essential to have a strategic design of internal communication channels and tools that allow relationships to be established with the workforce and adapt the behavior of leaders to ensure the well-being and happiness of the members of the organization. This is especially relevant in crises such as that derived from COVID-19, where high levels of stress and uncertainty are detected, where companies must find a way to reconcile their interests and the achievement of their objectives with the priorities of their employees. To achieve this, every organization must build a digital relational framework that allows intra-team communication to ensure cohesion and collaboration.

The strategic management of organizational resources and, especially, of internal communication as tools to deal with a crisis and promote the well-being and

happiness of the workforce is a topic of interest both for the Academy and for communication professionals. The changes produced by the pandemic have placed issues on the agenda of companies that, except for specific cases, until then had had less weight, such as teleworking.

Obviously, Covid-19 has generalized the experience of remote work and has highlighted some of the problems that arise from its implementation. But it has also been an opportunity for organizations to implement loyalty strategies to keep their staff aligned with corporate interests. Internal communication is a key resource in this regard, as it works on business intangibles and allows staff not to emotionally distance themselves from their brand while promoting cohesion, a sense of belonging, productivity, well-being, and happiness of the members of the organization.

The limitations of this work are specified in the possibility of incorporating the perspective of companies into the research. This is an aspect that is part of a project that the research team is going to develop in the long term to try to circumvent the secrecy of the entities, which have been unreceptive to requests for participation, arguing that they are still adapting to the new situation. Hence, other future lines of research could focus on deepening the use of teleworking in specific sectors, knowing how organizations have applied internal communication strategies to overcome the obstacles that Covid-19 poses for their organizational management, or how they have developed their corporate social responsibility during this period.

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