

Chapter 17

The COVID–19 Pandemic and How Brazilian Organizations Faced Its Challenges: From Remote Employee Behavior to Innovation Using Agile Management

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic brought many challenges to people, organizations, and governments, and businesses were impacted by social isolation measures and falling consumption. To cope with this situation, it was not only necessary to send the workforce out of offices into remote working or telecommuting, but it was also imperative to innovate to retain customers. In this context, this exploratory study was elaborated to better understand teleworking, workers' behavior, and the usefulness of agile management methods to innovate and help companies stay competitive in the Brazilian scenario. The chapter discusses the results of three surveys conducted during the most critical period of the pandemic, which showed that working from home, despite its great economic and social advantages, needs the companies' attention to employees' potential health problems, and that companies that adopted agile management earlier were able to adapt and innovate faster to overcome the challenges imposed by the pandemic.

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INTRODUCTION

Given the scenario imposed by the SARS-COV-2 pandemic, popularly known as Coronavirus in 2020, several sectors of the global economy were forced to review their work models, making several adjustments to overcome the sudden urgent challenges to minimize as much as possible the negative impacts generated by the sanitary security measures around the world.

After the WHO (World Health Organization) had declared the outbreak of the new coronavirus pandemic, which is a local epidemic that spreads across countries and continents (WHO, 2020), one of the actions taken by Brazilian states and municipalities in March 2020 was social isolation, which according to the Ministry of Health aims to ensure the maintenance of health services (Brazil, 2020).

These actions limited the circulation of people on the streets and non-essential services had to close their doors for months. This restriction made companies face several changes and uncertainties, such as the fact that many of them were forced to adopt the remote work model (Picchi, 2020).

The context of changes and uncertainties in the business environment intensified during the COVID-19 period of social isolation in Brazil in 2020, where companies were unable to open their doors for months due to state and local government decrees passed in order to prevent a collapse in the country's health system.

Moreover, due to the exponential advance of technology and market dynamism, companies need to adapt more quickly to changes and trends to remain innovative and competitive in order to provide better experiences for consumers.

In Brazil, the adoption of teleworking gained strength in mid-March 2020 following the measures imposed by municipal and federal governments. The adoption of this model was followed by the most diverse sectors of society, with emphasis on the service and education sectors.

According to research conducted by the Institute of Management Foundation (Fundação Instituto de Administração, FIA) between April 14 and 29, 2020 on large, medium, and small Brazilian companies, 94% of these organizations stated that employees' performance working remotely met or exceeded their expectations. However, about 70% of these companies reported that they intend to terminate or partially maintain this work model when the pandemic ends (Lazaretti, 2020).

The difficulties encountered in the compulsory implementation of remote work ranged from regulatory issues in markets such as the financial, where bank secrecy is very important, to the shortage of equipment acquisition such as notebooks and peripheral devices. (Saraiva & Boas, 2020).

As months passed, with technological issues mitigated and the health agencies predicting the extension of social isolation, various aspects related to human relationships began to receive more attention.

In this scenario of rapid change, uncertainty, and the need for quick answers, it becomes necessary to perform flawless process management because in a fast-paced business environment filled with uncertainty and change, project management can feel more like running an obstacle course. People have to run to overcome internal and external challenges by changing direction frequently. But acting quickly to keep projects aligned with shifting business priorities does not mean acting hastily. What companies need, especially their project and process management teams, is agility (Chin, 2004).

Considering this situation, the objective of this study is to identify and understand the key factors that influenced the adaptation and productivity by adopting teleworking and agile project management, as well as the behaviors of people who started working remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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