Teleworking and Psychological Well-Being in the Brazilian It Industry

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Abstract

This study investigates employees' psychological well-being (PWB) in the Brazilian IT industry before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The research uses the Psychological Well-Being Theory and User Acceptance of Information Technology (UTAUT) to examine the relationship between teleworking and psychological well-being. The Brazilian IT industry, the first IT market in Latin America, has experienced a significant increase in teleworking during the pandemic. The study employed a multiple-methods approach, including focus groups and in-depth interviews, to examine the impact of teleworking on PWB.

Keywords

Teleworking, Psychological Well-Being, Brazil, IT Industry

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted labor dynamics, with mandatory telecommuting replacing traditional face-to-face work arrangements. This study investigates how employees' perspectives affect psychological well-being in the Brazilian IT industry, using Psychological Well-Being Theory and User Acceptance of Information Technology (UTAUT). The study focuses on the Brazilian IT industry, one of the top 10 largest global IT markets and the first IT market in Latin America, with a global revenue of $45.5 billion in 2021 (ABES, 2022). The pandemic mainly influenced the choice of teleworking as a research topic, with Brazilians increasing from 7% to 58% during the pandemic. The pandemic also affected work relations, sometimes leading to disruptions in adaptation. The findings of this study will improve our understanding of the

subject and contribute to a better understanding of the impact of teleworking on psychological well-being in the Brazilian IT industry (ABES, 2022).

The rationale behind the Psychological Well-Being Theory relies on the factors chosen for investigation. Therefore, once the influence of teleworking on psychological well-being (PWB) is under investigation (Ryff, 1989), it makes sense to adopt a theory that assumes that early childhood results in adulthood well-being.

In addition, the rationale behind the User Acceptance of Information Technology (UTAUT) relies on the necessity of teleworkers to accept and adopt new Technologies to their professional repertoire provoked mainly by the coronavirus pandemic, within four primary constructs: (i) performance expectation, (ii) effort expectation, (iii) social influence, and (iv) enabling circumstances (Venkatesh et al., 2003).

Furthermore, the pandemic has dramatically influenced our research focus on teleworking. The shift was so abrupt that the percentage of Brazilians engaged in teleworking skyrocketed from a mere seven percent to a staggering 58 percent during the pandemic. This sudden change, coupled with the mandatory lockdowns imposed by governments worldwide, made teleworking the sole option for most workers. Thus, we aimed at answering the following research question: "How do employees perceive teleworking affecting psychological well-being in the Brazilian IT industry?" The justification for research question is the necessity for gaining insights into how teleworking somehow affects psychological well-being in the Brazilian IT industry, which is one of the 10 global IT markets and the first in Latin America. Also, the IT sector in Brazil was one of the markets that best-suited teleworking mode during the pandemic.

Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic has not only shifted our focus but also disrupted work relations. With the imposition of strict sanitary measures, the pandemic has forced us to adapt to a new normal. The findings of this study will significantly enhance our understanding of these disruptions, as detailed in the following sections. This research combines a multiple-methods approach, such as focus groups and in-depth interviews, on the influence of teleworking on psychological well-being in the Brazilian IT industry before, during, and after the pandemic.

2. Theoretical Background

Following World War II, the field of psychology shifted its primary attention towards therapeutic intervention and the promotion of healing while overlooking the significance of satisfaction and the development of a prosperous community (Seligman, 2002). As a result, positive psychology (PP) and psychological well-being (PWB) have evolved in order to redirect attention from illness to the cultivation of good qualities in life. The focus is on fostering resilience in the treatment and prevention of mental disease. Positive psychology is a field of study that specifically examines positive aspects of human experiences, such as

feelings of well-being, pleasure, joy, and optimistic views about the future. Additionally, it highlights individual attributes such as affection, bravery, and ingenuity. At the societal level, it emphasizes civic values such as accountability, care, selflessness, courtesy, restraint, acceptance, and diligence. Shifting the emphasis is essential for fostering resilience and enhancing mental well-being. According to Seligman, positive psychology focuses on positive subjective experiences at different time periods. This includes well-being and satisfaction in the past, flow, joy, sensual pleasures, and happiness in the present, and optimistic, hopeful, and faithful thoughts about the future (Seligman, 2002: p. 3).

PWB, or psychological well-being, has been recognized as a priority for governments worldwide and has been the subject of extensive research in recent years, both in scientific and general literature. Various studies have examined PWB, including those by Burns (2017), Beddington et al. (2008), Vieira et al. (2021), Kanten & Yesıltas (2015), Burns et al. (2015), Žižek, Treven, & Čančer (2015), Clark, Layard, & Senik (2012), Robertson & Cooper (2010), Srimathi & Kiran Kumar (2010), Baird et al. (2010), Burns & Machin (2009), Abbott et al. (2006), Ryff & Singer (2002), Ryan & Deci (2001), Ryff & Keyes (1995), and Ryff (1989). Research findings also indicate that having high levels of psychological well-being (PWB) is crucial for obtaining important outcomes related to strong and successful company performance (Robertson & Cooper, 2010). Happiness and well-being are distinct concepts. Happiness may be defined as a personal assessment of one's overall contentment with life. Well-being, in contrast, has a broader significance than mere emotion; it comprises an individual's cognitive assessment and overall satisfaction with life (Carlquist et al., 2017). Hence, a pertinent subject to be discussed.

3. Research Design

Sampling

This article employed three sampling techniques: (i) purposive, (ii) criterion, and (iii) snowballing sampling, because they best suit the research, following (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014; Myers & Newman, 2007). Purposive sampling was the strategy chosen because the quality of the data is essential, not its quantity. It would be impossible to grasp the nuances of the phenomenon analyzed through a questionnaire. (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014; Myers & Newman, 2007).

Criterion sampling was adopted because the criteria for the selection of participants and interviewees are the following: 1) Brazilians; 2) teleworkers; 3) from the IT sector, including service providers, software, hardware industries, and correlated activities; 4) five years of professional experience minimum. (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014; Myers & Newman, 2007).

Snowballing sampling strategy was chosen because it allowed participants to help locate additional participants/interviewees. It was instrumental in the Focus Group, where one participant (P#12) brought into the focus group session two

additional participants (P#1 and P#2), for example (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014; Myers & Newman, 2007).

Focus Group Design

The study used a Focus Group session to guide and improve questions for in-depth interviews, following Myers and Newman's semi-structured interview approach. A total of 13 participants were selected using a sampling strategy to ensure rigor. Open-ended questions were used to collect data. IT experts and interviewees from Brazil with at least five years of experience were invited via email. An online chat was conducted via Zoom®, and raw data was collected and video recorded.

In-depth interviews design

This study utilized qualitative, in-depth interviews supported by Myers and Newman's (2007) semi-structured interview approach. A Focus Group session was envisioned to improve the questions for the interviews. A total of 20 IT experts in Brazil were selected using the same sampling strategy, with open-ended questions to collect data. Interviewees were invited via email or snowballing; their responses were recorded in MP4 format. To maintain data confidentiality, warm-up questions were used to avoid social dissonance, availability was considered, and real identities and company names were kept confidential. No public dissemination was allowed. Cognitive biases were minimized by interviewing individuals from various ranks and positions, avoiding the Hawthorne effect, and minimizing Social Desirability Bias. Anonymity was secured to prevent artificial behavior due to criticism or reprimand. Despite the potential disadvantages of interviews, such as accidental omissions or incorrect descriptions, this study took measures to prevent such incidents. A welcoming atmosphere was created during interviews, and a disclaimer was read to participants. This disclaimer outlined the educational use of data, the absence of commercial purposes in the research, the voluntary nature of participation, the preservation of identities and company names, the freedom to stop participation at any time, and the authorization for direct citations and image use. In sum, this study employed a structured, qualitative approach to gathering data from IT experts in Brazil. It aimed to understand respondents' perspectives, behaviors, and experiences while minimizing cognitive biases and social dissonance.

4. Findings and Analysis

4.1. Focus Group Findings and Analysis

Focus Group was performed on 16 March 2023, from 9:13 PM to circa 10:45 PM. The meeting took place at virtual chat room platform Zoom®. The resulting files were stored in MP4 extension. The Focus Group session gathered N = 13 subjects and one facilitator, totaling 14 participants. The invitations (n = 15) were sent via phone call, text and voice mail, with 87 percent response rate formalized via email to those who confirmed. The study analyzed data from Brazilian Portuguese participants, removing irrelevant comments and field notes. The

data was transcribed and translated into English, resulting in 1422 valid answers. NVivo® 12 software generated charts for Word Cloud, as depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1 shows the words "work", "telework", "pandemic", "home office", "people", "company" as the most frequently mentioned in the focus group session. Figure 2 outlines the Text Word Analysis findings for the raw data on the

Source: NVivo 12 and dataset.

Figure 1. Focus Group Word Cloud chart.

Source: InfraNodus Text Word Analysis.

Figure 2. Focus Group Text Network.

Focus Group session:

4.2. In-Depth Interviews Findings and Analysis

Figure 3 shows the word cloud content analysis tool for in-depth interviews, following. Here, the word cloud was applied to visualize predominant data in word form and scale from most significant to most minor, where semi-structured, open-ended questions are asked, generating open codes. In this case, Figure 3 offered a low-cost alternative for analyzing text online and is faster than coding. NVivo 12 broke down the text into component words and counted their frequency in the body of the text; it helped stimulate more questions than answers and be a good entry point for discussion, revealing themes to be analyzed in the upcoming sections.
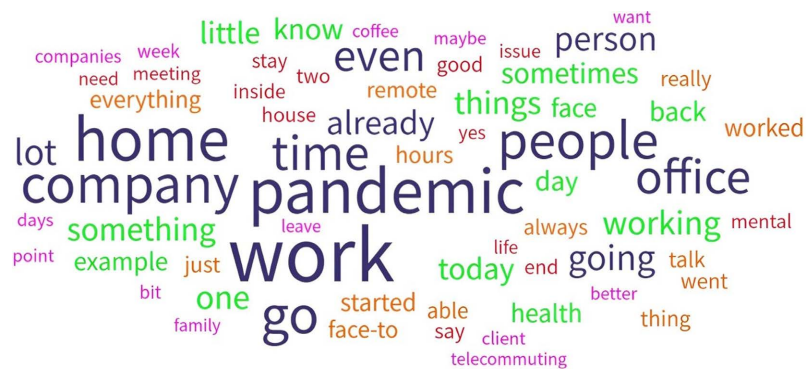

Source: NVivo 12.

Figure 3. Word cloud.

Figure 4 shows how the words "work", "home", "pandemic", "company", and "people", amongst others, are interconnected. In Section 3.4, the implications for such connections are discussed.

After an exhausting three-phase, iterative coding process, the open, axial, and selective codes were organized into categories and subcategories, resulting in nine emerging themes after careful content and thematic analysis, including (i) Well-being in Teleworking; (ii) Stress; (iii) Affected Relationships; (iv) Rehabilitation; (v) Life Style; (vi) Bad habits; (vii) Psychological disturbs, (viii) No company support for Psychological Health, and finally, (ix) Family Concerns. Table 1 compares the emerging themes from the focus group and the in-depth interviews as follows:

Table 1 shows the differences between Focus Groups and Interviews' emerging themes. Once the subjects investigated were the same, similarities were expected. Moreover, the Focus Group proved helpful in improving and refining the quality of the Interviews questions and, therefore, findings, which revealed four additional themes. Visual observation revealed that some categories overlapped (themes one to five) and that new categories were revealed (themes six to nine). For instance, Theme 7, Psychological Disturbs, appeared in the Interviews
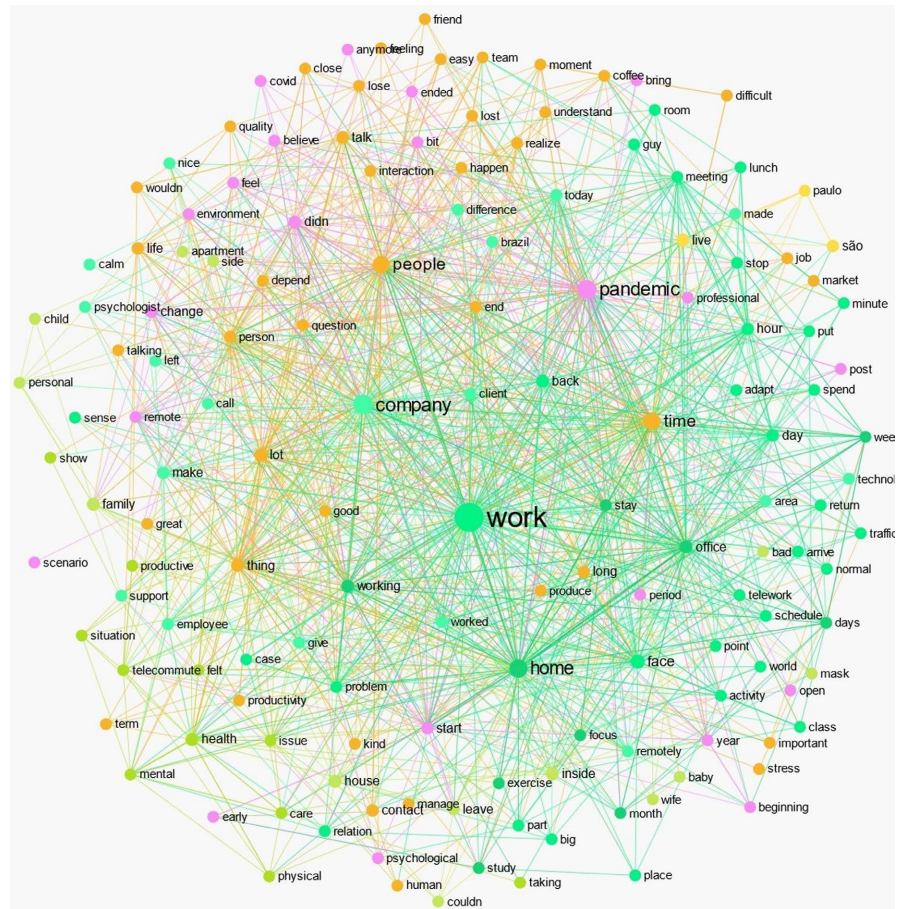
Source: InfraNodus Text Word Analysis.

Figure 4. Interviews' Text Network.

Table 1. Emerging Themes: Focus Group vs. Interviews

Theme	Theme 1 Well-being in Teleworking	Theme 2 Stress	Theme 3 Affected Relationships	Theme 4 Rehabilitation	Theme 5 Life Style	Theme 6 Bad habits	Theme 7 Psychological Disturbs	Theme 8 No company support for Psychological Health	Theme 9 Family concerns
Focus Group	1	1	1	1	1				
Interviews	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

and not in the Focus Group because, in public, people tend to avoid sensitive issues, which were discussed and detailed in private, in-depth interview sessions.

5. Discussion

We start the discussion by answering the research question, which is: according to the evidence gathered, the COVID-19 pandemic affected the PWB of Brazilian IT workers, with unknown effects on their mental health. Moreover, this in-

vestigation revealed new perspectives on PWB translated into themes. The Focus Group revealed five themes: (i) Well-Being in Teleworking, (ii) Stress, (iii) Affected relationships, (iv) Rehabilitation, and (v) Lifestyle. The in-depth interviews revealed four additional themes: (vi) Bad habits, (vii) Psychological disturbs, (viii) No company support for Psychological Health, and finally, (ix) Family Concerns (see Table 1). The analysis of the findings suggests that the interviewees unveiled sensitive subjects privately, more in the interviews than in the focus groups. However, the focus group helped provide better directions regarding the complementary deepening of the questions presented in the interviews. As a result, four additional themes emerged from the interviews. Furthermore, when the subjects are sensitive, evidence showed a preference for private discussion instead of group discussion.

5.1. Theme One: Well-Being in Teleworking

The Brazilian IT sector has shown a high acceptance of teleworking despite social isolation restrictions, lockdowns, and sanitary measures governments impose worldwide. Participants and interviewees have improved their quality of life and adapted to a new way of work, increasing their work-life balance (PWB) while teleworking. The adaptation process was not considered drastic compared to other sectors of the economy, prominently face-to-face activities, which migrated to teleworking compulsorily. The content analysis from Focus Groups and Interviews revealed a high level of satisfaction and an increase in quality of life with teleworking despite the challenges and need for socialization in the IT industry. The subjective experiences of happiness, consisting of an emotional component (high positive and low negative affect) and a cognitive component (satisfaction with life), were detected in the research. The User Acceptance of Information Technology (UTAUT) dimensions, such as performance expectation, effort expectation, social influence, and enabling circumstances, were interconnected with the four UTAUT dimensions. The research gap revealed perspectives not observed in past studies, mostly related to the PWB affected by social isolation, sanitary measures, and lockdowns during the pandemic. Teleworking did not significantly affect the mental health of the investigated workers, and most demonstrated affinity with teleworking.

5.2. Theme Two: Stress

The study found that *Stress* was perceived similarly in both FG and interviews, with two types of stress being related to the pandemic and the chaos experienced by society. The interviews revealed that stress was related to increased meetings and the mix of personal life with work, leading to psychological disturbances. The text network analysis showed a connection between productivity, mental health, and the chaos of the pandemic. Support theories revealed that hedonic and eudaimonic well-being were impacted, while eudaimonic items were affected by good relationships and environmental mastery. Stress impacts performance

expectation, effort expectation, social influence, and enabling circumstances. The research question revealed that stress affects psychological well-being in the Brazilian IT industry.

5.3. Theme Three: Affected Relationships

The pandemic has significantly impacted social isolation and home confinement, with affected relationships being highly relevant to medium and high-level management levels. Teleworking has presented challenges, but face-to-face interactions are preferred due to the physical interaction. Word clouds from FG and interviews show frequent connections between company, person, and people, with loss, trust, and challenge being the most common words. Eudaimonic and hedonic well-being theories are impacted, with negative emotions affecting personal well-being (PWB) and social influence (UTAUT). Some interviews suggest that face-to-face interaction is a gap to be filled, with some suggesting remote interactions or meeting the team. The research suggests that the need for relationships in teleworking has a gap to be studied and alternative PWB solutions proposed.

5.4. Theme Four: Rehabilitation

The study reveals that rehabilitation is highly relevant for medium and high-level positions in the Brazilian IT industry. Adapting to a new work and delivery system was a challenge during the pandemic, and the technology to support adaptation was not always available. The study also discusses the importance of organization and separation of work and personal life. The research suggests that the evidence of rehabilitation without organization influences personal well-being (PWB) in the employees' Brazilian IT industry. The study highlights the need for resilience, recovery, innovation, and organizational skills in the IT industry.

5.5. Theme Five: Life Style

The study explores the impact of teleworking on the quality of life and health of Brazilian IT industry employees. The research found that teleworking improved the quality of life, increased leisure time, and improved health. Participants and interviewees mentioned that their lifestyle changes led to increased quality of life, better sleep, and better health. The study also found that eudaimonic happiness, which is influenced by activities with meaning and purpose, contributes to total well-being. The research also found that teleworking positively impacted autonomy, self-acceptance, life purpose, and environmental mastery, while hedonic happiness affected happiness, subjective well-being, and positive emotions. The study suggests that the lifestyle while teleworking influences personal well-being in the Brazilian IT industry.

5.6. Theme Six: Bad habits

The study discusses the challenges faced by employees in the Brazilian IT indus-

try due to bad habits while teleworking. These habits include not having a good organization, separating personal life from professional life, and not taking breaks for exercise, coffee, and water. The study also highlights the challenges of video conferences and the need for better communication during the pandemic. The research suggests that these habits can affect low-level management, with subcategories such as distractions, lack of commitment, and misuse of teleworking being explored. The study also suggests that eudaimonic habits, such as autonomy, self-acceptance, personal development, and good relationships, can influence PWB, while hedonic habits, such as happiness and positive emotions, can affect PWB.

5.7. Theme Seven: Psychological Disturbs

The pandemic has significantly impacted psychological disturbances in the Brazilian IT industry, with interviews revealing fear, loneliness, and insecurity. These disturbances can be mitigated by providing support from companies, such as teleworking. Support theories suggest that happiness, subjective well-being, positive emotions, autonomy, self-acceptance, personal development, life purpose, good relationships, and environmental mastery can help alleviate these disturbances. Teleworking also influences psychological disturbances, with performance expectations, effort expectations, social influence, and enabling circumstances playing a role. The research answers the evidence of psychological disturbances during the pandemic and suggests that teleworking may influence psychological disturbances in the Brazilian IT industry.

5.8. Theme Eight: No Company Support for Psychological Health

Companies providing support to professionals during the pandemic have been criticized for not addressing the sports aspect of employees and not providing therapists or psychologists. Companies have been found to focus more on high-level management and not provide support to employees. The lack of support has been identified as a major issue, with codes revealing frustration and feeling unattended. Support theories suggest that eudaimonic factors affect autonomy, self-acceptance, personal development, life purpose, and environmental mastery, while hedonic factors affect happiness, subjective well-being, and positive emotions. Teleworking has also been found to influence psychological health in the Brazilian IT industry.

5.9. Theme Nine: Family Concerns

The pandemic has significantly impacted the Personal Well-Being (PWB) of Brazilian IT employees, as they struggled with family health preservation and self-preservation. The stress of caring for family members, children, and personal problems, as well as the fear of losing their mother, has led to a reevaluation of values and priorities. The support theories suggest that eudaimonic factors, such as self-acceptance, life purpose, and environmental mastery, are affected by the

pandemic, while hedonic factors, such as happiness and subjective well-being, are influenced by social influence and enabling circumstances.

6. Implications and Research Limitations

The current study aims to shed more light on Psychological Well-Being (PWB) literature by providing an overview of the most frequently cited themes, nine of which were revealed in this research. We improved our understanding of how employees perceive teleworking and how it affects PWB in the Brazilian IT industry. As demonstrated in the previous sections, evidence suggested nine themes or nuances by which employees were somehow influenced. In addition, some implications are disclosed in the following paragraphs.

Regarding Themes One (Well-being in Teleworking) and Five (Life Style), implications suggest the perceptions by the participants and interviewees influences during and after the pandemic because they reported welcomed challenges, such as the opportunity to stay with family and taking advantage of staying home to personal development, studying, taking online courses for instance. Once this research investigated IT industry, implications for other business should be investigated, such as virtual business negotiations, for instance. Conversely, implications regarding the remaining Themes (Stress; Affected Relationships; Rehabilitation; Bad habits; Psychological disturbs; No company support for Psychological Health, and Family Concerns) were perceived by the participants and interviewees as influencing somehow PWB. Theme two, Stress, for instance, revealed in participants and interviewees higher levels of anxiety affecting somehow mental health; the uncertainty of returning to work during the pandemic, pressures of all sorts, uncertainty, pain, and tension, were reported in this research. Theme Three, Affected Relationships, for instance, revealed implications from teleworking and the pandemic influencing somehow social interactions, involving losses, challenges, and the need for inventing creative means for socialization due to the sanitary restrictions during the pandemic, somehow affecting the family bonds. In sum, the migration from face-to-face work to the massive adoption of teleworking during the pandemic revealed implications individually and socially, as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2 shows how teleworking in this research had implications with other factors involving family, leisure, habits, for instance.

Table 2. Implications.

Theme Category	Theme 1 Well-being in Teleworking	Theme 2 Stress	Theme 3 Affected Relationships	Theme 4 Rehabilitation	Theme 5 Life Style	Theme 6 Bad habits	Theme 7 Psychological Disturbs	Theme 8 No company support for Psychological Health	Theme 9 Family concerns
Implication	Individual	Individual	Social	Individual/ Social	Individual	Individual	Individual	Social	Social

However, the findings and analysis are limited to Brazil's IT industry and the dataset. In addition, teleworking during the pandemic reached 58 percent of the workers in Brazil; many other sectors or industries can benefit from it, such as human resources, administrative areas, educational areas, and any other that can be done without the absolute need to be face-to-face, but more studies in those areas are needed. Also, other countries can have different findings due to cultural or economic scenarios, even in the IT industry.

The research has also implications in correlate fields and subfields of research, such as 1) Business Negotiations (Dias et al., 2023; Dias, 2018; Dias & Lopes, 2019; Dias, 2020; Dias & Lopes, 2020; Dias et al., 2015; Dias, 2016). 2) Government Negotiations (Dias & Navarro, 2020). 3) Project Management (Dias, Navarro, & Valle, 2013). 4) Leadership (Dias et al., 2022; Dias & Lopes, 2020). 5) Cooperatives (Dias, 2018).

Finally, during the interviews, it was also mentioned that people's phobias due to social isolation could lead to further studies in psychological areas to correlate perhaps to social anxiety disorder as per the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Finally, implications on the return to work after the pandemic should also play a relevant role in the workers' psychological well-being in general.

7. Future Research

There are perspectives revealed in the study that suggest the interviewees and participants' behavior has somehow changed or readapted differently after the coronavirus pandemic was over. Therefore, we encourage future researchers to investigate Return-to-Work (RTW) on the employees' perspective, because it is usually studied on the employer's perspective, to gain a complete vision of the process. We found evidence of a hybrid RTW strategy that should be explored in future studies. Finally, future studies should evaluate the integration of RTW and PWB to provide deeper insights on both subjects.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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