



EMPLOYEE INVOLVEMENT IN DECISION-MAKING

European Project

ASSIFECO (Associação Sindical Independente Dos Ferroviários De Carreira
Comercial) and ASPAS (Associação Sindical do Pessoal Administrativo da Saúde)

THE INVOLVEMENT OF EMPLOYEES IN DECISION-MAKING IN TIMES OF CRISIS, AS A KEY TO THE EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATION OF THE COMPANY'S WORK.

Portugal National Report

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1. Introduction

This research aims to acknowledge how the employees were or were not involved in decision-making during the most recent and still present time of crisis, the pandemic, understanding its importance to the effective organization of the company's work.

As part of this European project a questionnaire was distributed for the various countries participating. The questionnaire was designed with the goal of gathering information from the employee's perspective, from the commerce and services sector, about their involvement on the decision-making process, during the pandemic COVID-19. To have a full perspective of the crises impact on the companies, it was also designed an interview to gather information on the employers' point of view.

The results show different perspectives between employees and employers on how the crises situation was managed in the companies, however there is common opinion between them both: The involvement of employees in the organizational changes due to situations of crises, such as the pandemic, has a very important role to guarantee effective adaptations.





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2. Country context

During the pandemic situation the profits of many businesses were affected, and Portuguese companies were no exception. The reduction of profits led to a reduction in the capacity to employ the same number of people that was being employed before.

According to Diário de Notícias, in Portugal the rise in unemployment affected, in gender, 3,4% of men and 3,8% of women. In age the unemployment affected 18,6% of the workers up to 24 years old and 7% of the workers between 25 and 34 years old.

A study held by the general directorate of employment and labour relations in Portugal (DGERT), concluded that there was a notable break on the companies activities on the second trimester of 2020, with negatives results on their liquidity. The study also mentions that accommodation and catering sectors are the most affected by the pandemic. Oddly, DGERT also concluded that the companies that benefited from the support measures adopted by the Government were the ones in a more unfavourable situation, having these measures played a very important role in safeguarding their financial sustainability and preserving employment.

Despite the disadvantages of teleworking, like social and professional isolation and the lack of face-to-face contact with colleagues, on a positive side, the consequence of mandatory teleworking brought some advantages for the employees, such as the reduction in the time spent in traveling between home and work, the reduction on food spending and or transports, a better opportunity to manage work with family time, as well as providing autonomy in carrying out the work. (General Directorate Of Administration And Public Employment)

National Occupational Health Program (PNSOC) revealed the pandemic situation increased the mental instability of many workers, stress situations, depression, anxiety or burnout are frequently related by a significant number of workers, due to the pressure





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they feel to answer the demands of the current work environment and the pandemic situation. PNSOC stated workers in teleworking present a higher risk of feeling psychological affected, since there might possibly exist a greater interference by the employer. For all that mentioned above, the General Directorate of Health, in Portugal, released a guide of good practices and how to monitor the mental health risks to which the workers are subject, knowing that these risks were enhanced by teleworking as consequence of the pandemic.





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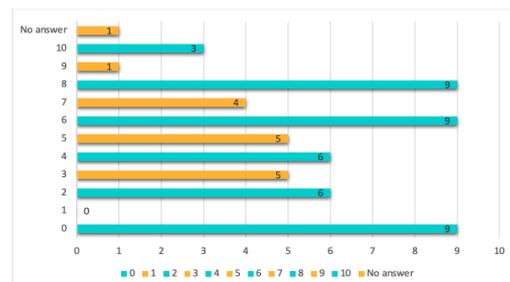
3. Research Results

3.1. Questionnaire results

In Portugal, 58 answers were collected, being most of the respondents aged between 35-54 years old (76%), 21% between 55-70 years old and the others 3% between 18-34 years old. Most of respondents are female (76%) and only 24% are male. The sample of this questionnaire is composed mainly by administrative workers of the health sector and a few workers of the public transports sector.

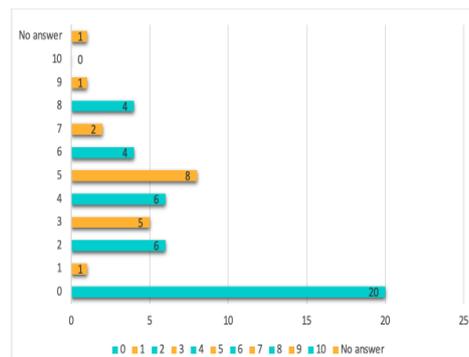
The first question got 57 answers. As shown in the graphic, 9 people were not informed at all about the changes in their company due the pandemic, only 3 considered they were well informed during this time, 22 participants consider they were informed but poorly and 23 assume they were being satisfactorily informed.

Graphic 1-To what extent were you informed (directly or through your union) about changes in your company during the pandemic?



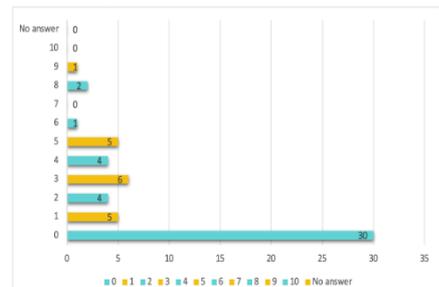
On the second question the graphic points out a big part of the respondents, 20 of them, were not consulted about the changes at all and 26 people were consulted, but not very often. Only a few, 11 from the total sample, state they were more frequently consulted. One person did not answer the question.

Graphic 2-To what extent were you consulted (directly or through your unions) about changes in your company during the



when changes were introduced in your company

To the third question more than half of the 58 people in the total sample claimed not to have participated at all, 24 respondents say they have participated a little, but not much and only



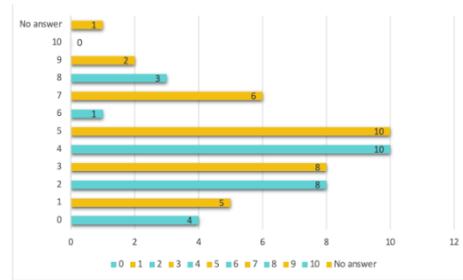


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4 people state they were somehow or frequently participative.

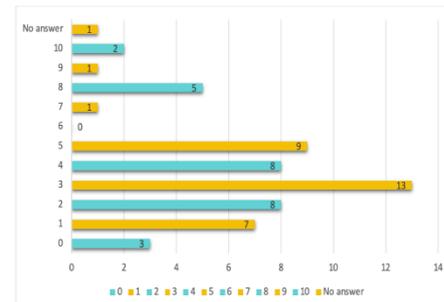
On the question four, about the atmosphere where the changes were introduced, one person did not answer, 25 people said it was frustrating or generally frustrating, 21 people considered it average, neither very bad or very good and the other 11 stated the atmosphere was close to calm and serene.

Graphic 5-How do you see the atmosphere in which these changes were introduced?



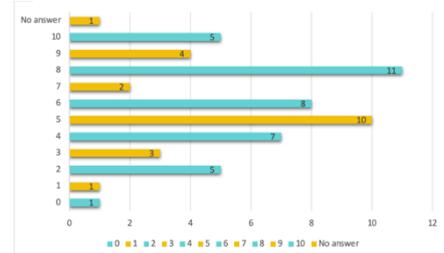
The fifth question had 57 answer, more than 31 people rated from up to 3, which means they believe the changes were made without regarding the interest of the employees and only 9 people rated above 7.

Graphic 4-How do you consider the organizational changes made in your company?



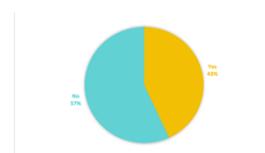
The question six, regarding the attitude of the employees, reveals the majority was frequently active, 5 people rated 10, so they were always active and 17 people from the sample rated 4 or below, considering themselves more passive.

Graphic 6-How would you rate your attitude towards the organizational changes that were introduced in your company during the pandemic?



The question seven revealed that most people, 57% of the respondents, is not aware of their legal rights to obtain information and consult the company and a minority of 43% of the sample is aware.

Graphic 7-Are you aware of the legal rights you have to obtain information and consult the company, including in times of crisis such as a pandemic?

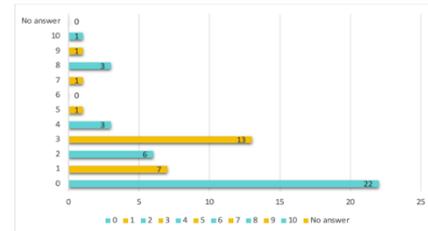




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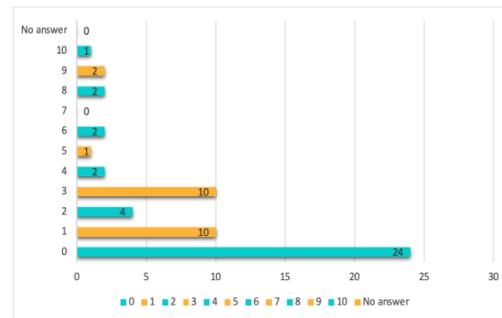
The eight question made it clear that in general people were not offered with options, as 22 rated 0, so no choice at all, and only 2 rated 9 and 10. After 0, the most chosen level was 3 by 13 people.

Graphic 8-To what extent were you offered options or alternatives to the organizational changes introduced into your company during the pandemic?



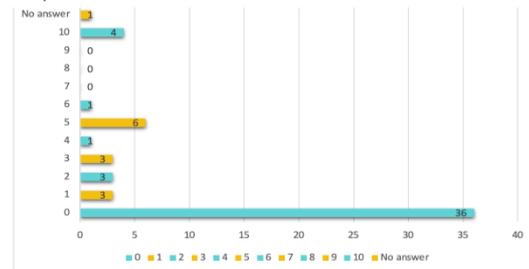
The question 9 left no doubts, 24 people rated 0, which means they were never asked to give their opinion on organizational challenges. Only 5 people consider they were asked often.

Graphic 9-To what extent were you asked to present ideas and give your opinion about the organizational challenges introduced in your company during the pandemics?



For the question 10, the majority 36 people didn't feel that their gender affected them in the offered working conditions. However, between the 4 people who stated they felt affected, 3 are female and 1 is male.

Graphic 10-To what extent would you say that your gender (sex) affected you in the working conditions offered to you because of the organizational changes introduced in your company during the pandemic?

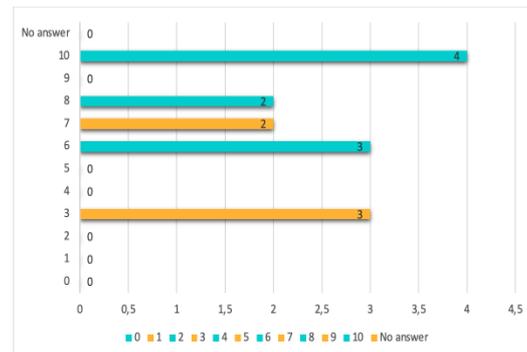




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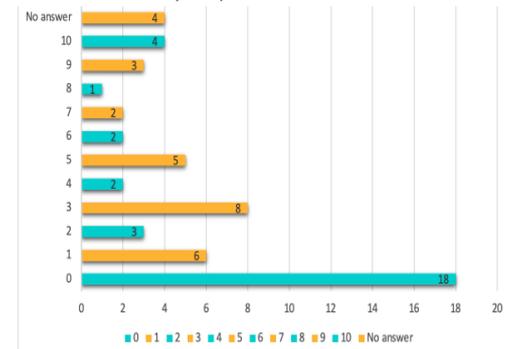
On the questions 11 and 12, only 24% of the sample was able to work from home and the remaining 76% always had to work presential. Regarding the ones who could work from home, in general, they reveal it was easy to manage good work conditions at home, only 3 people rated 3.

Graphic 11-If yes, to what extent have you managed to organize your work at home under the same conditions as your normal workplace? [Non-mandatory question.]



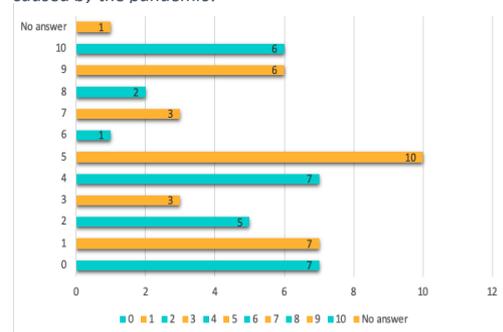
The question 13 revealed that most respondents point out lack of support from the company, 18 people rated 0, which means no support at all, 17 rated between 1 and 3, indicating weak support and only 4 people consider there was a very good support.

Graphic 12-To what extent would you say you received support from your company to adapt to the new working conditions caused by the pandemic?



The fourteenth question was probably the most ambiguous and there is no agreement, 14 people rated 0 and 1, meaning they didn't feel safe and 12 people rated 9 and 10, meaning they felt very safe and the most common rating was 5, so 10 people felt neither totally safe nor at high risk.

Graphic 13-How safe did you feel in terms of health in the company after introducing the organizational changes caused by the pandemic?

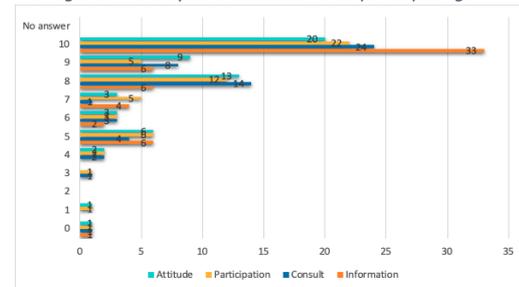




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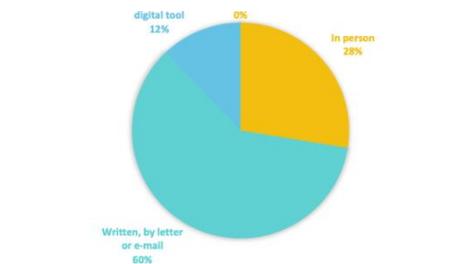
On the fifteenth question people considered the for topics, Information, Consult, Participation and Attitude, highly important, being rated with 10 by 33, 24, 22 and 20 people, respectively.

Graphic 14-In the hypothetical case of another crisis similar to the pandemic, how much is it important to receive from the company: information, consultation, participation in decision-making and what is your attitude towards participating?

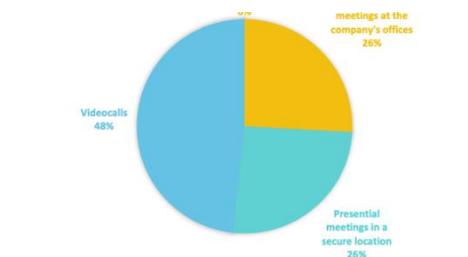


On the sixteenth question people showed their will of being informed by letter or email (60%) and of being consulted by videocalls (48%) or in presential meetings at the office (26%) or at a secure location (26%).

Graphic 15-In the hypothetical case of another crisis like the pandemic, which information and consultation mechanism do you prefer? (Information)



Graphic 16-In the hypothetical case of another crisis like the pandemic, which information and consultation mechanism do you prefer? (Consult)



The last question gathered some suggestions of the respondents, such as to inform al the departments of the company about the changes in a coherent way, in order to avoid the distribution of different information inside the company and to do it in time; To talk with the employees, trying to get them involved in the process and to understand their needs, making sure they are taken in consideration in the implemented changes.

3.2. Interview results





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The interviews held in Portugal were made to employers on the retail, catering, events, transport and technologic sectors. From a total of five interviews, two interviews were done by phone call, and the others were led presential. There are interviewees from Porto, Paredes, Aveiro, Lisbon and Vila Pouca de Aguiar. The answers were gathered between 13 and 26 of October, 2021.

Most of the interviewees stated that they had a reduction on the invoice, as there was a closure of presential services, and they could only work online and some of them had to stop the activity because the type of business didn't allow them to continue to work online. On a positive side one employer saw the pandemic crises as an opportunity to rethink its business and its structure while being closed, something he couldn't have done if it was continuously on the active, and another employer affirmed that this time was good to potentialize the digital platforms.

Three of the employers involved their employees on the organizational changes by allowing them to communicate their needs in order to be more efficient at work. One of the interviewees even revealed that in its company a group was created for discussion of situations and resolutions. One employer on the retail sector stated that the employees were not fully involved in the process as the company struggled to adapt, however in this corporation all communications regarding changes were made as early as possible and taking in consideration the needs of the staff, when the governmental decisions allowed it.

In general, on the employer's perspective, the employees had a participative attitude during the times of crises, keeping themselves informed about health measures to perform their functions in safety. The employer of a catering and events company stated the employees were eager to cooperate, they presented good ideas and methods that the company ended up adopting due the pandemics, but that will be remain in the future. Another employer on the restaurants sector said the pandemics translated in





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and increase of interest for its employees, they started to show a constant will to keep up with the changes and to keep themselves updated on the current issues.

According to the employers, the best practices focused on complying with legal requirements, ensuring safety for the employees in their workspace. For those who were working remotely for a certain period, when it was time to go back to the company the method was common to all the interviewees, they have opted for a gradual and alternated come back, reducing the risk of infection. The installations were adapted and prepared to receive the staff in the safest way. The frequent testing and mandatory use of the mask were also measures that helped to prevent mass infections. During the mandatory remote work period, a software company allowed their staff to manage each one workload, so they could adapt their schedule with their own conditions at home. In the particular case of a transportation company one of their good practices was the comprise of keeping the employees constantly updated about international requirements and legislation, as during the pandemic they still had to work and cross many countries.

The most common opinion of the interviewed employees was that, overall, they would keep the methods that were used during the last crises. In the retail sector, the recommendation is to reinforce the staff working on the online service. The employer of a transportation company noted the importance of better information by the governmental entities. The guarantee of conditions for remote work was also a point considered important to be stressed in the future.





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4. Conclusions and suggestions for improvement

After analyzing the data collected through the questionnaires and the interviews it is possible to draw some conclusions. It is possible to see an incoherence between the answers of employees on the questionnaire and the answers of the employers on the interviews.

In general, the employees showed themselves unhappy with how the pandemic situation was held by their superiors and considered that they were not offered an opportunity to participate on the necessary changes to adapt the company's organizations. On the other hand, the employers stated they questioned their employees about their needs, keeping a fluent communication during the times of changes.

This research aimed to understand the involvement of employees in decision-making in times of crisis, as a key to the effective organization of the company's work. Unfortunately, the conclusions on this paper depend on the perspective we analyze, as if we took in consideration the answers of the employees, we would conclude there was a lack of communication and involvement of the staff on the adaption to the crises, however if we investigate the interviews, we determinate there was an effort from the employers to involve their employees and respond to their needs.

Despite the ambiguity of these results one opinion, we can find in common between employees and employers, both agreed that is relevant to involve the employees on the organizational decisions. On the questionnaires it was possible to understand that the lack of communication inside the company had a negative impact on the organizational changes, and, according to the interviews, the participation of the employees was very positive, as they were not only communicating their needs as well as they were helping in finding solutions and contributing with the knowledge they acquire on the field.





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The author recognizes as limitations of the study and the fact that the present results cannot be analytically generalized for the population. This topic is actual, recent and it keeps growing in interest as it is a worldwide issue that affected several workers and companies around the world, therefore some research is needed and helpful for employees and employers. For future research it would be important to reach bigger samples so that the conclusions are more reliable than the ones presented in this study.





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Attachments

No attachments to include.

