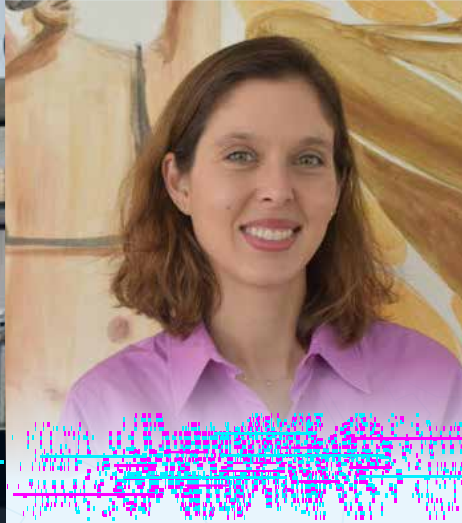


/Industry Contribution

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Covid 19 was a disruptor and shifted the sector towards digital collaboration and the future of work.

The covid-19 pandemic significantly impacted corporate communication channels all over the world. Employees' digital experience was already a priority in some sectors, such as technology - an early adopter of hybrid and remote working configurations. We can't say our market was as prepared as tech to face distancing measures when Covid-19 struck. Consulting engineering companies that already had implemented business communication platforms and digital collaboration policies faced a much smoother transition to home office than counterparts who didn't – the majority, unfortunately. Now restrictions are being lifted, and offices are gradually being reoccupied. Some may conceive that the competitive advantage of mastering the online environment will lose momentum. But this might not be the case.

The need to invest in digital collaboration tools was not new when the pandemic began, but Covid-19 certainly made it more urgent. Even when the world had not yet embraced home office, the urge for tools to facilitate collaboration between colleagues was already expressed by workers. In 2013, Deloitte surveyed 3.600 employees of European companies to assess their take on digital collaboration. The research resulted in a report called Digital collaboration: Delivering innovation, productivity and happiness. It pointed out

that employees' satisfaction is considerably higher when the workplace culture offers collaboration tools to enable «richer communication, document sharing and co-creation».

When remote working was a distant reality to most companies, digital collaboration was already relevant to talent retention. Now it seems imperative to have tools that enable cooperation within and outside the physical office. Research suggests that, while controversial, remote work is popular with employees. According to a report published on November 2021 by Qualtrics, «Hybrid work is here to stay, and employees have high expectations for in-office and remote work experiences». Ernst & Young's Work Reimagined Employee Survey 2021, which gathered information among 16,000 respondents across 16 countries, confirms the trend: lack of flexibility could drive 54% of the workforce to quit.

In this scenario, digital communication platforms aren't just a competitive advantage. They are necessary for companies who wish to compete for talent – crucial for service companies like ours. But digital collaboration platforms aren't the solution alone. Recent research by Microsoft shows that remote work environments tend to cause «the collaboration network to become more heavily siloed». The reason is less spontaneous transversal contact among people from different teams. So, in addition to the ICT solution, it is also crucial to have a cohesive Communication & HR strategy to incite the desired interactions in the digital workplace. Managers must make sure each one on their teams understands what must be done, how and when. Strengthening weak ties – relationships between colleagues who don't interact much - is crucial for the cohesion and continuity of a company's culture and managing knowledge.

At TPF Engenharia, we were fortunate to adopt a digital collaboration platform before the pandemic began. Its integration with a document management solution made collaboration straightforward in the remote working configuration. Our virtual environment facilitates the sharing and editing of documents, the management of virtual teams, and the synchronous and asynchronous management of information. We promote virtual events, both technical and informal ones - to promote social interaction. The combination between our tools and policies has given us encouraging results. Proof of that is our 20% growth in revenue in the last 2 years.

Key take-aways

- Employees have placed flexibility as one of the most relevant aspects of work.
- Digital collaboration tools must be accompanied by a strategy regarding how they must be used.
- Managers should keep close contact with teams.
- When your workforce is dispersed, additional attention to cohesion (strengthening weak ties) is needed.
- The company must create opportunities for informal interactions between members of different teams.

There are situations where physical presence will always be necessary, as with supervisory services. Also, we must not forget that some people still prefer to work full-time in the office. The key is not to have one rule that fits all. The path TPF Engenharia has chosen is doing its best to offer our workforce the flexibility they desire to have whenever possible. For this reason, investments to make collaboration smooth, easy and vibrant in the digital environment are strategic to us. Although we live in particularly uncertain times, we believe «the near future» requires the capacity to embrace hybrid. Those who have not addressed the importance of investing in communication won't be prepared and will likely face recruitment and productivity problems.

