Chapter 3
The Effects of Remote Work on Family Relationships:
Examples From Academia

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ABSTRACT

This chapter analyses the effects of remote work on family relationships during confinement due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The study is centered on faculty and staff members from a private business school in Puebla, Mexico. The research was conducted almost five months after the university closed its doors and moved all its activities online, having participants time to adapt to the new normal. A scale was developed and validated, and later on, it was applied in a country where family values, cultures, and traditions are strong. The scale included five distinct areas of study: remote working conditions, time and task management, work performance, stress, and family relations. All the business school faculty and administrative staff were invited to participate in the study. Results show employees' perceptions about how working remotely positively or negatively affected their relationships at home and their productivity at work, leading to the design of best practices and useful guidelines that will minimize the adverse effects of remote work while enhancing the positive ones.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the effects of remote work on faculty and staff members' family relationships in a private university in Puebla, Mexico. UPAEP University had to close its doors and move its operations online due to the COVID-19 crisis. Working from home resulted in unforeseen challenges that all employees had to face, with almost no time to prepare. Still, with the confinement extending over several months, people started adapting to the new conditions.

The chapter presents theoretical foundations regarding the current conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic and how they are being faced in remote work and family dynamics. It also integrates the main characteristics of Mexican families, those of remote work, stress, and burnout syndrome. The university is briefly described, along with the contingency plan developed to ensure that faculty and staff could continue their tasks while working from home. A scale was designed and validated and is briefly described along with the procedure followed in conducting the research.

This chapter aims to show the current remote working conditions of faculty and staff and how these have affected their family relationships. The chapter is oriented towards answering the following questions: What are the critical dimensions of remote work that can affect family relationships? And, how have family relationships been affected since work has moved online?

BACKGROUND

The business school at UPAEP University was founded in 1973 and is located in Puebla, Mexico. When the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic, all students were sent home. In this challenging scenario, faculty worked regular hours, starting the process of migrating their courses to online platforms. Just as decisions were made to close the campus, the university developed a continuity plan to ensure that academic activities would not be interrupted. A website was created to integrate the information about the plan, including the technological resources to accompany the migration process, official communications, updates on the pandemic, and a series of health and wellbeing recommendations.

Compulsory courses for staff and faculty about the use of video conferencing tools, focusing on fast-track technology-based courses that were developed entirely online. At first, faculty members were thrilled about working from home -because no one knew how long the situation would last- but as time progressed, difficulties emerged. It took time to redesign courses and materials. Some had to take their office computer home, as other family members would also be working or studying from home, and not all would have access to a personal computer. Few members had experience teaching online and some had never used specific digital tools. There was a gap between inexperienced and digitally dexterous employees. Some were teaching and learning at the same time.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: CONCEPTS, DEFINITIONS AND EXISTING THEORIES

The unprecedented situation has revealed the necessary analysis of the New Ways of Working (NWoW) within the New Ways of Life (NWoL). The conflicts associated with NWoW and NWoL have repercussions in two directions: from work to family, and vice versa. Work from home can have a negative spillover

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