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Literature Review on Return to Work in the Brazilian it Industry

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ABSTRACT: *This study focused on the reintegration of workers into the Brazilian IT workforce after the pandemic, specifically examining the literature on the subject. When individuals in the Brazilian IT industry return to work, their psychological well-being (PWB) is impacted. Findings revealed a preference for teleworking, showing advantages and disadvantages for companies. For example, increasing productivity gains for workers, including working from anywhere without geographical restrictions and reporting better work/work-life balance, are disclosed.*

KEYWORDS: Return-to-Work (RTW); information technology; Brazilian IT market

INTRODUCTION

The global pandemic rapidly spread throughout the globe, resulting in a significant global mortality rate. Lockdowns and social isolation have profoundly transformed society across all domains of existence. Less is known about the impact of the return-to-work procedure on return-to-work (RTW) and Psychological Well-Being (PWB) in the Brazilian IT sector. This research topic warrants more inquiry and requires an unprecedented study. Hence, we aim to conduct an initial academic qualitative investigation on the Return to Work (RTW) in the Brazilian IT sector, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. We seek to comprehend how workers successfully adjusted to the novel circumstances wherein telecommuting, in-person work, and hybrid work arrangements coexist.

Although there has been much study on Return to Work (RTW) before the pandemic, there are still unresolved aspects of RTW after the pandemic. Return to work (RTW) is typically examined following various medical conditions, including stroke (Edwards et al., 2018; Treger et al., 2007), workplace injuries (Krause et al., 1998), mental disorders (Hees et al., 2012), occupational therapy (Désiron et al., 2011), treatment of coronary heart disease (Biering et al.,

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2013), musculoskeletal disorders (Schultz et al., 2007), and depression (Schoenbaum et al., 2002), among other recent studies. Furthermore, a few studies have investigated returning to work from the employer's point of view (Lysaght & Larmour-Trode, 2008; Westmorland et al., 2002).

Thus, this study examined the process of workers returning to work (RTW) from their viewpoint. When they return to work, the psychological well-being (PWB) of individuals in the Brazilian IT industry is impacted.

BRAZILIAN IT INDUSTRY

The Brazilian IT sector is in the top 10 biggest IT markets, with a performance of $45.5 billion in 2021 and an expected performance of $46.2 billion in 2022. This fact represents around 2.7 percent of the Brazilian GDP, according to ABES (2012). Hence, an extensive, continuously expanding, and noteworthy IT industry must not be disregarded. "The market is sufficiently extensive to sustain businesses of significant value, comparable to unicorns, and also provides clear opportunities for successful startups to expand into both emerging and developed markets." (Valor, 2023, p.1). In 2021, the IT world market (domestic market only, export excluded), performed $2,790 billion (ABES, 2022) The top 10 Global IT markets are illustrated in the following Figures 1 and 2:

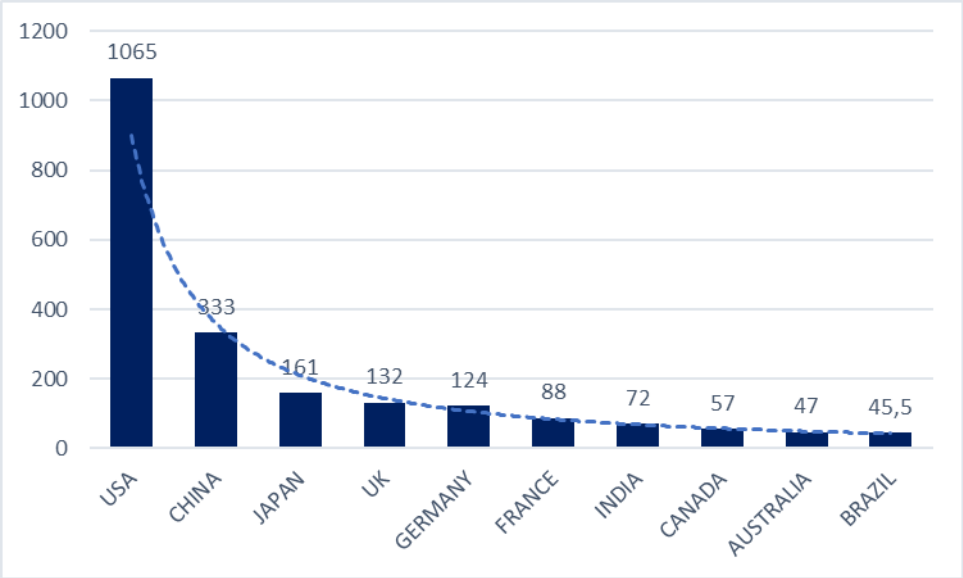

Figure 1 IT World Market 2021. Source: adapted from ABES, 2022

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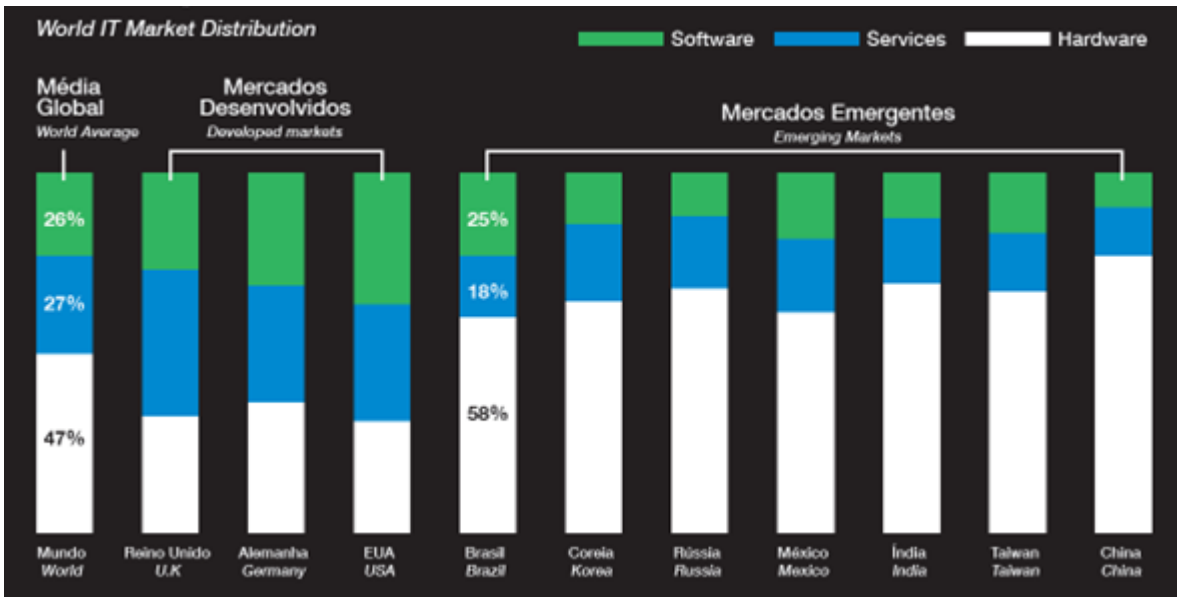

Figure 2 World IT market distribution. Source: ABES, 212, p. 6.
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Figure 1 displays the rankings of the top 10 nations in the IT sector for 2021. On the other hand, Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of the global IT market, categorizing it into established and developing countries. This distribution is divided into three segments: software, services, and hardware. It is worth noting that the bulk of IT activity in Brazil is focused on hardware, accounting for 58 percent, software at 25 percent, and services at 18 percent (Schmitz, 2024).

METHODOLOGY

This work follows an inductive approach, interpretive, qualitative research using a mono-method rationale, such as a literature review on Return-to-Work, applied to the Brazilian IT industry, aiming at updating and enhancing the current epistemology on this subject.

RETURN TO WORK (RTW) AFTER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Despite extensive research on Return to Work (RTW), there are few studies on RTW post-pandemic. RTW is usually studied after medical conditions, such as (a) stroke (Edwards et al., 2018; Treger et al., 2007), (b) injured workers (Krause, Dasinger and Neuhauser, 1998), (b) after mental disorders (Hees et al., 2012); (c) after occupational therapy (Désiron et al., 2011); (d) after the treatment of coronary heart disease (Biering et al., 2013); (e) after musculoskeletal disorders (Schultz, et al., 2007); (f) after depression (Schoenbaum, et al., 2002) to name a few recent studies. In addition, a handful of studies have examined RTW through the employer's perspective (Lysaght and Larmour-Trode, 2008; Westmorland, et al., 2002).

After the pandemic, this concept is still used to speak about RTW, now also addressing people who had COVID-19 complications (Descatha, Evanoff, and Fadel, 2023; Godeau et al., 2021; Aben, Kok, and de Wind, 2023; Nowrouzi-Kia et al., 2023; Garzillo et al., 2022).

Chowdhury (2024) asserts that teleworking post-pandemic provides significant advantages for firms and their workers. Organizations can decrease or eliminate expenses related to physical space and recruit and use skilled individuals worldwide, all while addressing and minimizing challenges related to immigration.

Chowdhury (2024) highlights the benefits that firms may have, such as enhanced productivity for employees who can work remotely without geographical limitations and improved work-life balance. However, Chowdhury (2024) highlights several drawbacks and disadvantages of teleworking, including (a) absence of in-person communication, (b) diminished ability for brainstorming and problem-solving, (c) reduced socialization, (d) decreased camaraderie, (d) limited opportunities for mentoring; (e) restricted knowledge sharing; (f) challenges in performance evaluation and (g) compensation; (h) concerns regarding data security and regulation.

Remote work is gaining popularity among workers because it offers flexibility, independence, and convenience. According to a Gallup study, 43% of individuals in the United States have engaged in remote work, and a majority of 73% expressed a desire to continue this practice in the future. The progress in technology, shown by video conferencing and collaboration software, has enhanced the efficiency of remote work. According to Upwork, a study showed that 63% of firms saw a boost in production, while 71% saw an improvement in employee satisfaction. These statistics highlight the potential of remote work to not only maintain but also enhance productivity and job satisfaction. The prevalence of remote work is projected to increase as a result of the evolving nature of work, with the potential for up to 80% of employment to be carried out remotely (Westover, 2023, p.1).

Nevertheless, the resumption of work highlighted the increasing significance of post-coronavirus pandemic circumstances as a worrisome factor in occupational medicine, affecting the welfare and productivity of employees. Occupational physicians have a vital role in enforcing limitations on job duties or hours and facilitating the reintegration of employees with post-coronavirus symptoms back into the workforce. Their expertise and guidance are crucial in managing the transition back to work.

RTW, or return to work, is defined by several factors. Firstly, it involves the total number of contract hours being paid equally. Secondly, it considers the employee's work status, whether they are present or absent from work. Thirdly, it takes into account the number of hours worked. Lastly, it also considers the time it takes for an employee to return to work and earn the same amount as their total contract hours. These definitions are supported by various studies (Schoenbaum et al., 2002; Hees et al., 2007).

Furthermore, the Covid-19 epidemic has significantly transformed life and work routines, leading to profound transformations. This study focuses on the research subject of Return to Work (RTW), aiming to provide insights into best practices and the impact of pandemics on workers. The outcomes of this study may contribute to disseminating knowledge and understanding in this area (Garzillo et al., 2022; Luqman & Zhang, 2022; Tan et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, in examining the behavior of Brazilian IT workers in the aftermath of the pandemic, it is impractical to assume that all IT personnel operated under the same working arrangement both before and after COVID-19. Consequently, we examined three different modes of work both before and during the pandemic: (i) in-person, (ii) hybrid, and (iii) remote labor. Furthermore, a significant majority transitioned into teleworking abruptly due to the pandemic, which imposed limitations on social mobility and implemented stringent sanitary protocols to mitigate the spread of the virus.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The pandemic has deeply affected society, resulting in a transformation in employment patterns and social dynamics. Nevertheless, studies are scarce about the pandemic's effects on returning to work and the PWB of individuals in the Brazilian IT sector. Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, teleworking became the obligatory form of labor in several regions (with certain exceptions) due to government-imposed social isolation and health-related limitations. With the relaxation of social distance regulations, face-to-face work has become discretionary in many situations, prompting some workers to choose remote work. This research examines the intricacies of returning to work (RTW) after the pandemic, specifically emphasizing three modes of employment before and after the pandemic: in-person, hybrid, and remote work.

These observations have several implications for research into different fields of research, such as (a) negotiations with governmental agents (Araujo, C.; Dias, M., 2022; Correa, Teles, Dias, M., 2022; Dias & Navarro, 2018); (b) banking negotiations (Dias, M., 2019, 2019b; Dias, M. and Albergarias, 2019; Dias, M., 2022; Teles, A., Dias, M., 2023; Schmitz, T. & Dias, M., 2023); (c) business negotiations (Dias, M. et al., 2015; Dias, M. et al., 2015, 2014, 2012); (d) business mediation (Dias, M., 2018); (e) industrial negotiations (Dias, M., Navarro and Valle, 2013, Dias, M., et al., 2014; Dias, M., et al., 2013; Dias, M., & Davila, 2018); (f) financial negotiations (Dias, M.; Pereira, L; Vieira, P., 2022).

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Further study is encouraged to explore the Return-to-Work (RTW) phenomenon in various contexts and nations. The investigation has uncovered subtle distinctions indicating that the conduct of the respondents and participants has undergone some alteration or adjustment after the conclusion of the coronavirus epidemic. We have discovered indications of a hybrid return-to-work approach (RTW-H) that warrants further investigation in future research. Future

research should also assess the incorporation of return to work (RTW) and psychological well-being (PWB) to understand both topics better. Furthermore, we advocate for doing statistical analyses to determine the magnitude of the effect, whether it is good or negative, and the extent to which Return to Work (RTW) affects workers' psychological well-being.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

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