The Relationship Between Remote Work, Knowledge Sharing and Knowledge Hiding

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Abstract: Communication and the professionals working with it are playing an increasingly important role in organizations, expanding their scope of operations and influencing decision making and strategies. Hiding knowledge can hinder good performance in the communication process, as it prevents knowledge from reaching those who request it. This study analyses the influence of remote work on knowledge sharing and on the motivations for knowledge hiding from the perspective of company communication managers. To do so, an exploratory survey was undertaken with relevant data being collected during interviews with 20 communication managers, 17 of whom are communication managers of large companies in different business sectors and 3 are managers in communication consultancies. The interviews lasted an average of 23 minutes and the transcribed interviews were subjected to content analysis. In the perception of the interviewees, knowledge sharing is fundamental for the work of communication professionals. The interviewees perceived that remote work has both positive aspects, such as greater productivity and quality of life, and negative aspects, such as lack of face-to-face contact and fatigue due to excessive online exposure. it is worth remembering that for these interviewees remote work was a response to the Covid-19 pandemic, being characterized by one interviewee as an emergency measure. In addition, most respondents believe knowledge hiding has increased due to the widespread adoption of remote work practices by companies in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. According to most of the interviewees, the intention behind such knowledge hiding is related to the lack of a sharing culture, insecurity, digital burnout and distrust. These reasons, although they may also explain knowledge hiding in face-to-face environments, gain greater relevance due to the lack of informal face-to-face meetings (coffee time, lunch breaks, etc.), which could generate proximity and trust. The research paves the way for more detailed investigations into knowledge sharing and knowledge hiding in the communication processes.

Keywords: knowledge hiding; knowledge sharing; remote work; face-to-face work, Covid-19

1. Introduction

Within an organization, efficient knowledge management contributes towards securing a sustainable competitive advantage, which differentiates it from its competitors (Mahdi *et al*., 2019). One of the characteristics of efficient knowledge management is the knowledge sharing (Wang *et al*., 2014), as the creation and acquisition of knowledge are insufficient, it must be shared among individuals so that the organization obtains greater benefit. The shared knowledge can be either tacit, i.e. held in people's minds and therefore more difficult to share, or explicit, i.e. documented, and recorded in manuals, standards and procedures (Nonaka, 1994). The benefits of knowledge sharing (KS) are seen in the form of innovation and the development of new products, processes and services (Tseng, 2010), as well as business process efficiency (Ahmad and Karim, 2019).

Although KS is voluntary within organizations, the involvement of senior management usually means it is more likely to occur (Choudhary and Mishra, 2021). Despite the perceived benefits and the conscious attempts by employers to encourage KS, many employees are unwilling to share their knowledge and intentionally withhold knowledge (Connelly *et al*., 2019). Knowledge hiding (KHi) is defined as "an attempt by an individual to withhold or conceal knowledge that has been requested by another person" (Connelly *et al*., 2012, p. 65).

Several negative effects can arise from this behavior, such as diminished creativity due to limited interaction (Černe *et al*., 2014), a breakdown of trust among employees (Connelly *et al*., 2012). When knowledge, especially tacit knowledge, is not properly shared due to concealment behaviors, and employees leaving the organization for whatever reason and taking their knowledge with them (Serenko, 2016). In addition, hiding knowledge has

other harmful effects on the organization's environment, such as rework and mistrust, as other employees will need knowledge that some employees do not want to share.

Within an organization, KHi can be a problem in the various departments, and become more accentuated during remote work (Choudhary and Mishra, 2021). According to Choudhary and Mishra (2021), this may be because hiding is easier or there is more digital burnout during remote work.

It is understood that some company departments need greater interaction with other departments to carry out their activities. This is, for example, the case of communication, which also relates to the external environment. Given the above and the increasing importance of the area of communication in companies (Riel, 1995), this research presents the following research questions:

Q1. What is the importance and benefits of KS according to communication managers?
Q2. How does remote work positively or negatively influence KS according to communication managers?
Q3. What are the main motivations for KHi during remote work according to communication managers?

Hence, the general objective of this research is to analyze the influence of remote work on KS and on the motivations for hiding knowledge according to communication managers in companies. This study could contribute both to the theoretical field and to communication departments practice in companies. In the theoretical field, few studies into KS have considered anything other than the instrumental aspect of communication departments, focusing particularly on information and communication technologies (ICTs). In practice, the work of a communication department is based on the integration between its members, with the other areas of the company and with its various external audiences. Therefore, understanding the difficulties involved in KS and the reasons why KHi in the Communication department can be a differential for Communication managers concerned with obtaining the best performance from their teams in generating value for organizations.

2. Literature review

2.1 Knowledge sharing and knowledge hiding

KHi can be said to occur when a person who receives a request for knowledge they have, refuses to provide that knowledge to the person requesting it (Oliveira *et al.*, 2020). This is one form of lack of KS, the other form being when the person does not have the knowledge and therefore cannot share what they do not know.

KHi is divided into three dimensions (Connelly *et al.*, 2012): a) playing dumb - the person claims not to have the requested knowledge; evasive hiding – the person says they will provide it later, which will not happen or provides only a part of what was requested; and, rationalized hiding – in this case, a justification is offered for not providing the knowledge, that is, the person falsely states they are prevented from providing the knowledge by a third party.

A number of authors have sought to understand the motivations for hiding knowledge. In their literature review, Jafari-Sadeghi *et al.* (2022) identified 51 factors determining the increased occurrence of KHi, such as: workplace ostracism; job insecurity; abusive supervision; perceived time pressure; distrust; competitive work environment; lack of reciprocation; personality traits; etc. These motivations were identified in different contexts, for example, service companies, and universities, among others. However, the only study looking at the context of remote work, from Choudhary and Mishra (2021), identified the following motivations for KHi in a remote work environment by consultants: competition, conflict, poor personal relations, insecurity, organizational politics, distrust, ease of hiding, lack of informal communication, digital burnout, and loss of control. Distrust being an example of a motivation identified in both remote and face-to-face work.

2.2 The remote work environment

The emergence of Covid-19 in December 2019 (WHO, 2020) accelerated the adoption of a work model that had already been evolving due to the development of technological innovations in information technology and telecommunications, remote work. According to Jämsen, Sivunen and Blomqvist (2022, p. 2), remote work "illustrates a form of work that employees perform outside the physical premises of the organization by utilizing communication technology.". One type of remote work is Work From Home (WFH), where the employee performs his work at home with the support of ICTs. The Covid-19 pandemic exposed most professionals to remote work (De *et al.*, 2020).

Remote work, in its various nuances, allows for increased flexibility or mobility of workers (Yang *et al.*, 2022). There are several advantages related to remote work, such as: cost reduction - savings in travel expenses and hiring employees at lower cost locations (Morrison-Smith and Ruiz, 2020); retaining talent - by offering employees more flexible working hours, which can increase motivation and productivity (Morrison-Smith and Ruiz, 2020). On the other hand, there are also disadvantages, such as: challenges in balancing work and personal life, as individuals may work longer hours or have difficulty separating personal and professional life during the day (Cho, 2020); asynchronous communication to the detriment of synchronous communication can hamper the transmission and processing of information among workers, decrease knowledge transfer and the quality of the work produced (Soda *et al.*, 2021).

2.3 Corporate communication

With their increasing impact on business, particularly since the 1990s, communication departments within organizations have been gaining in importance, (Riel, 1995). In recent years, especially due to the spread of digitization processes in society, communication departments have seen a significant increase in the range of tasks and functions they undertake (Brockhaus and Zerfass, 2022). The communication departments are responsible for leading several important organizational processes such as image crisis management, internal communication and employee engagement, and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) reports, in addition to relationship initiatives with various audiences through the organizations' digital channels, among others. Communication professionals have come to play a strategic role in companies (Koehler and Ansgar, 2019).

In January 2022, a search using the expressions "Corporate Communication" and "Knowledge Hiding" conducted on the Web of Science and Scopus platforms found no articles. Saladrigas *et al.* (2016) propose a conceptual relationship between Communication and Knowledge Management. These authors suggest there is a convergence between the areas due to their social nature and the need for interaction between people, among other factors. Nevertheless, Saladrigas *et al.* (2016, p. 3) recognize that "the relationship between the disciplines of Institutional Communication Management and Knowledge Management are rarely mentioned and much less studied" (2016). Although Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is widely related with knowledge management or knowledge sharing, the area of Institutional Communication is not usually involved in the researches. Lemos and Barbosa (2021) emphasize that the integration between KM and communication is based on internal communication, which is a part of the organizations communicational process, but it does not encompass all fronts of Institutional Communication. Pizzaia *et al*. (2018, p. 62) discuss aspects of communication present in seven knowledge management models and conclude that "such models have paid little attention to communication, which is essential for the information gains fluency within the organization and generates useful knowledge".

3. Research Methods

3.1 Classification

This research is classified according to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019) as: a) interpretivist philosophy, as it focuses on perception, based on a small sample; b) inductive approach, collecting data to explore the phenomenon; c) qualitative method, because it aims to understand the phenomenon; d) exploratory strategy, considering there is still a need for a better understanding of the topic; and e) cross-sectional time horizon, since the data were collected at one point in time. These options are in agreement with Anand, Offergelt and Anand (2021), among others, who point out that more qualitative research is needed to understand KHi.

The unit of analysis and the respondents are one and the same, that is, communication managers in companies. This profile was defined considering the relevance of their communication departments for companies and the lack of research considering KHi. In addition, the option for the profile of communicators interviewed is in line with the latest survey "What to expect from Organizational Communication in Brazil", carried out by the Brazilian Association for Business Communication (Aberje), the main association of the Institutional Communication area in the country. According to the survey, middle managers in general (43%) is the predominant hierarchical level of the professional responsible for the participants' Communication area. Then we have the level of Management in 27% of the participants and Superintendence/Vice Presidency in 11%. During the Covid-19 pandemic, professionals began working remotely by government determination, which may have favored KHi.

3.2 Data collection

Data were collected during individual interviews held between November 2021 and January 2022. The semi-structured interview script was adapted from Choudhary and Mishra (2019), and consists of four parts: 1) characterization of the respondents; 2) importance and benefits of KS; 3) differences between remote and face-to-face work; 4) motivations for KHi. Choudhary and Mishra's (2019) interview script was translated into Portuguese and adapted. Subsequently, the script was reviewed by two specialists on the subject (content validation) and by a professional with the same profile as the interviewees (face validation). The suggested modifications were applied to the data collection final instrument.

Professionals were selected interview according to the following criteria: a) having worked remotely for at least 6 months during the Covid-19 pandemic; b) being a communication manager in a company operating in Brazil; c) having at least 5 years of experience in their field of work. These professionals were identified from a list of members of the Brazilian Association of Business Communication. The invitation was made via WhatsApp, where the research objective and the researcher responsible for the interviews were identified.

Saturation was applied to determine the number of interviews, as recommended by Saunders *et al*. (2019). According to Guest *et al*. (2006), in homogeneous groups saturation is usually reached with 12 interviews. Saturation in this research was obtained with the eighteenth interview, considering that no new ideas were identified in the two subsequent interviews. Table 1 presents the data related to the 20 interviewees and the interviews carried out.

Table 1: Data related to the interviewees and interview

Interviewee	Gender	Educational background	Time with the company	Time in the position	Length of Interview (min)	Number of pages transcribed
1	F	Journalism	3 years	1 year	41	9
2	F	Journalism	10 years	3 years	28	6
3	M	Journalism	2 years	2 years	28	6
4	F	Journalism	4 years	4 years	24	5
5	M	Journalism	1 year and 6 months	6 months	28	6
6	F	Journalism	4 years	2 years	17	4
7	F	Public Relations	2 years and 8 months	1 year and 6 months	14	3
8	F	Journalism	3 years	3 years	31	7
9	F	Journalism	13 years	8 years	21	4
10	F	Journalism	4 years	4 years	16	4
11	F	Public Relations	14 years	14 years	27	6
12	F	Journalism	2 years	2 years	18	4
13	M	Journalism	14 years	5 years	41	7
14	F	Public Relations	1 month	1 month	14	3
15	F	Public Relations	10 years	6 years	14	3
16	F	Journalism	10 years	6 years	21	4
17	F	Pedagogy/ Marketing/	3 years and 6 months	3 years	35	6

Interviewee	Gender	Educational background	Time with the company	Time in the position	Length of Interview (min)	Number of pages transcribed
		Communication				
18	F	Public Relations	9 years and 8 months	5 years	8	2
19	F	Public Relations	4 years and 4 months	2 years	17	4
20	F	Public Relations	10 years	2 years	15	3

Legend: F – female; M – male.

Prior to beginning the interviews, authorization was requested to record the interviews. The recorded interviews were transcribed to facilitate data analysis.

3.3 Data analysis
The data were analyzed after each interview, thus making it possible to identify when saturation occurred. The content analysis was applied as proposed by Bardin (2009). It involves systematic procedures for the content description, using qualitative or quantitative indicators (Bardin, 2009; Krippendorff, 1980). The open coding involved separating the data based on the interpretation of its content and was followed by axial coding in which the open codes were grouped into categories, allowing comparisons between the interviews. The codes emerged from the interviewees' speech.

One researcher carried out the interviews, and two researchers simultaneously analyzed the data obtained. Any differences found between the respective analyses were discussed by the researchers until they reached a consensus, thus, verifying reliability according to Krippendorff (1980).

4. Analysis and Discussion of the Results

4.1 The Importance and Benefits of KS
The importance of investigating KS is a point of unanimous agreement among the communication leaders interviewed. The terms mentioned by the interviewees to represent the importance of KS were: fundamental (9 interviewees), important (5 interviewees), essential (3 interviewees), vital (1 interviewee), gigantic (1 interviewee) and sharing requirement (1 interviewee). This is in line with Wang *et al*. (2014) who consider KS necessary in order for the company to obtain sustainable competitive advantage.

The benefits generated by KS in remote work mentioned by the interviewees were: increased agility; reduced interruptions; creation of documentation; ease of accessing people; improved employee engagement; increased collaborative work. These benefits are in line with Ahmad and Karim (2019), who point out that KS impacts business process efficiency. None of the interviewees highlighted the relationship between KS and innovation in the communication department, which may in part be due to the functions of the communication department. On the other hand, some interviewees talked about the difficulties encountered with KS during remote work. For Interviewee 3, the biggest obstacle to KS is insecurity: "it is not clear to people which information is shareable and which is not". In the relationship between KS and remote work, some interviewees gave examples of how the face-to-face mode can be important for better KS. Interviewee 14, for example, stated that "today I went to a face-to-face meeting because the business was confidential, I needed to be there, you understand, it couldn't be online".

4.2 Differences between remote and face-to-face work
Respondents indicated both positive (12 respondents) and negative (15 respondents) aspects to remote work. Regarding the main differences perceived by the interviewees, two negative aspects of remote work were the most cited: the lack of face-to-face contact and the fatigue produced by excessive exposure to the screen. The lack of face-to-face contact can be identified, for example, in the speech from Interviewee 17: "Whoever is in communication has some very antennas connected because that is how we learned to get information from people, so this loss was big, I think of about 80%". Interviewee 19 mentions that remote work "imposes several relationship challenges, I think that communication work is very relationship-based and this relationship is much

more difficult to establish online". The interviewee's perception is linked to Wolton's idea, emphasizing that "to communicate is less and less to do with transmitting, rarely to sharing, being more and more to do with negotiating and, finally, to living together" (Wolton, 2010, p. 62).

On the other hand, the two positive aspects most mentioned by the interviewees were: greater focus, generating more productivity, and increased quality of life, because of the extended length of time spent at home, giving the employee greater flexibility. Interviewee 18 exemplifies the improvement in people's quality of life: "working remotely meant I didn't have to make a poker face, if there was a moment when I was not (...) ok, I could arrange my schedule better". The idea of freedom to reschedule appointments may be associated with the hierarchical level and also the family situation of each individual, as studies have also pointed out the constant pressure on workers in remote work: "It can be expected that the dark side of virtual work and gig work, will raise questions of stress, presenteeism, work overload, surveillance, and monitoring. New and severe forms of digital surveillance will have to be understood and their implications gauged" (De *et al.*, 2020, p. 4).

Table 2 presents the positive and negative aspects of remote work in relation to face-to-face work listed by the interviewees. It is important to highlight that some interviewees pointed out not one, but various differences, which is why the final number in the table does not match the number of interviews.

Table 2: Positive and negative aspects of remote work compared to face-to-face work

Aspect	Number of Interviewees
Negative for remote work:	
Harm arising from lack of face-to-face contact	8
Fatigue from excessive time online	6
Distractions in the home	2
Challenge of understanding and appropriating knowledge	1
Distance from the business	1
Positive for remote work:	
More focus generating greater productivity	5
More quality of life	4
Learning from the changes	3
Greater autonomy	2
More recorded knowledge	2
Less corridor gossip	1

The range of positive and negative aspects mentioned by the interviewees, as shown in Table 2, points to very individualized reasons for choosing the best working method. In addition, it also explains the maturity of this process in different organizations. Accordingly, Interviewee 13 points out: "When you adopt remote work in an emergency, as it was, it is not remote work, it is emergency work, within the emergency there is a lack of planning, after all no one in their right mind planned Covid-19 to be able to prepare for it." Similarly, interviewee 12 suggests: "we have to learn to work in this other way, right? For 18 years, things worked the other way, so it's still a learning experience, you know?". DE *et al*. (2020) raised 14 important aspects for research and practice on the impact of digitization during the Covid-19 pandemic. Five of the items relate directly or indirectly to remote work.

4.3 Motivations for KHi

Most of the interviewees (12) believe that KHi has increased or may have increased with remote work. "It is easier for those with bad intentions to find the subterfuge not to share online" argued Interviewee 1. For Interviewee 2, "if they do not want to share, it is easier for staff not to respond to emails or WhatsApp/text messages". Only one interviewee believed KHi may have decreased with remote work, whereas seven perceived no relationship between KHi and remote work. This is in line with the results obtained by Choudhary and Mishra (2021, p. 9), who explain the perceived increase in KHi by the fact the "knowledge hider does not see the knowledge seeker physically as face to face confrontation does not happen".

For Interviewee 19, "the communication area occupies a very strategic position, closely linked to decision-making […], so only very rarely when we seek information do people refuse to pass it on". This idea is compatible

with the position of Brockhaus and Zerfass (2022, p. 3), "communicative positioning supports the strategic positioning of businesses (corporate positioning), brands (brand positioning), people (CEO positioning) or ideas (issue positioning) in the public sphere".

Regarding the reasons for KHi, (shown in Table 3) seven respondents believe that, regardless of the work mode, the decision to hide knowledge is associated with power. In the words of Interviewee 3: "this knowledge can, for some reason, provide status power, even if unconsciously, it is the maintenance of privileges within the organizational structure". The definition of power, according to the interviewees, is linked with issues related to ego, vanity, nature, character, fear of losing a job. According to Rechberg (2020), companies where "knowledge is power" face difficulties with sharing knowledge.

Table 3: Motivations for KHi

| Motivations for KHi	Number of interviewees
Lack of a sharing culture – knowledge as power, maintenance of privileges, etc.	7
Insecurity - absence of structured KS processes, what can and cannot be shared (protecting themselves)	5
Digital burnout - fatigue linked to remote work	5
Unable to identify the motives for KHi.	3

Five interviewees associate KHi with insecurity among staff, usually related to insecurity regarding whether they should or can share knowledge. Another five believe put the failure to share knowledge down to fatigue and forgetfulness related to the exhausting routine of remote work: "I will limit myself to saying that, and I have no availability, willingness, or desire to be online longer than half an hour, 40 minutes", argues Interviewee 15, as an explanation for not sharing knowledge. Three respondents, although believing KHi has increased with remote work, do not understand the reasons why that would be the case.

When questioned about whether they themselves had previously concealed knowledge, 7 respondents admitted having done so. The reasons given being: 1) insecurity – lack of a structured KS process, fear of losing recognition for their knowledge, protecting themselves (3 interviewees); 2) digital burnout – tiredness, lack of time, to avoid generating more work (3 interviewees); 3) distrust – not knowing people well, not knowing who to trust (1 interviewee). These findings considering communication managers in companies in Brazil were also identified by Choudhary and Mishra (2021) in relation to employees in consulting companies in India.

5. Conclusion, Limitations and Future Research

This study fully achieved its objectives. First, by identifying the importance of KS for the communication managers in companies in Brazil interviewed herein. For these managers, the benefits of KS are associated with increased process efficiency, considering access to knowledge through documentation or access to people, as well as greater agility. They perceived that remote work has both positive aspects, such as greater productivity and quality of life, and negative aspects, such as lack of face-to-face contact and fatigue due to excessive online exposure. However, it is worth remembering that for these interviewees remote work was a response to the Covid-19 pandemic, being characterized by one interviewee as an emergency measure. Most of the interviewees believe that remote work has increased KHi, the reasons being: the absence of face-to-face encounters, lack of a sharing culture, digital burnout, insecurity or distrust.

This study contributes to academic knowledge in three main ways. First, by exploring KHi in a poorly researched context, i.e., communication managers and remote work. Second, the study findings extend the knowledge on remote work and its relationship with KHi, showing its influence on both KS and KHi. Finally, this study analyzes the motivations for KHi in a remote work context. Figure 1 presents a summary of the contributions.
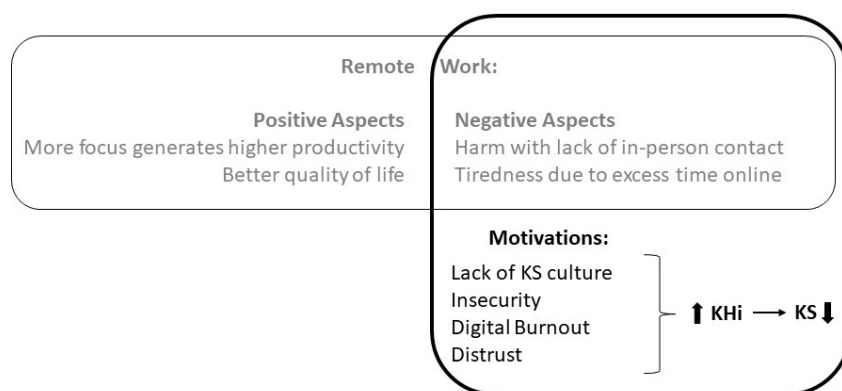
Figure 1: Summary of the academic contributions

The awareness that KHi has increased with the adoption of remote work can help communication managers prioritize ways to mitigate KHi, one of them being the adoption of hybrid work, whereby employees work in the company's office some days and outside the office others. Hybrid work could reduce the opportunities for KHI that arise with remote work while providing greater face-to-face contact. Digital burnout could also decrease with hybrid work, while still maintaining the flexible schedules and increased productivity cited by respondents as positives.

The lack of KS culture, insecurity and lack of trust are motivations to which managers should also pay particular attention. The lack of a culture of KS could be addressed by managers through the adoption of mechanisms such as knowledge repositories, knowledge networks and work groups where the importance of KS and the benefits that its adoption brings to them became clear to employees and for the organization. The insecurity and lack of trust of employees could be addressed by managers through the establishment of clear rules of what can and cannot be shared. In this way, the risk for employees is considerably reduced, as sometimes KHi behavior occurs due to a lack of knowledge of what can and cannot be shared, what risks are involved and what behaviors are expected by the organization. Butt *et al.* (2021) found that personal relationships can increase trust and consequently diminish KHi. The authors suggest informal get-together between employees within organizations to increase personal relationships, which is more complicated but not impossible during remote work. Butt and Ahmad (2021) indicate the interdependency to create a sense of reciprocity, which can mitigate KHi. This could be used more easily than incentivizing personal relationship during remote work.

This study has two limitations. First, the interviews were conducted solely with communication managers, hence the perceptions of other employees in the and outside the department were not considered. Extending this study to include other staff in the communication department, as well as other departments would provide greater insights into company culture. In addition to expanding the scope of the research, it would be important because it will allow to identify different motivations that could lead to KHi behavior. The second limitation concerns the interview as the sole means of collecting data. Future research would benefit by employing other forms of data collection to complement our understanding of the motivations for hiding knowledge. A quantitative survey could increase the number of responding companies and employees, in addition to opening possibilities for other research questions related to the topic.

Acknowledgements

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