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ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING IN THE MIDST OF THE PANDEMIC: THE CHALLENGES OF A STATE GOVERNMENT'S CORPORATE SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

This article deals with a case study, focused on organizational learning after the onset of the pandemic caused by COVID-19, highlighting the actions and projects developed by one of the State Government's Corporate Schools. The objective of the research was to analyze what were the main tools adopted, how the organizational learning process of the employees took place during this period and what the results were. As this is a case study, a descriptive and exploratory research was adopted, examining the situation of the Pernambuco Finance School - in its mission to train the various civil servants during the pandemic, with unstructured interviews. From the analysis carried out, it is concluded that organizational learning can lead to the development of new processes, new projects and alternative solutions, in addition to being a social process, as individuals or groups never learn on their own.

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19-derived 2020 global pandemic resulted in an outbreak that spread around the world and hit everyone's routine surprisingly quickly. Society needed to adapt to new routines and new ways of doing and doing things, including social isolation, which was the most limiting adaptation. Thus, the interest in research and studies focused on the most diverse needs for adaptation and, consequently, a new organizational learning process was born in this scenario. According to Motta and Vasconcelos (2006), dealing with multiple elements of reality, with uncertainty and with paradoxes such as integration/commitment versus transience/change becomes a challenge in this context. However, with this line of argument, the "man who learns" must accept these challenges, learn and evolve with them, since his own identity is an element under construction. Within the need to continue with the training of public servants on farms and to reinvent themselves, the concept of the "man who learns" emerges here. Thus, the article will explore the study from three objectives, namely:

Did the Pernambuco Farm School (ESAFAZ) manage to reinvent itself? Is it possible to carry out training for servers in the midst of the pandemic? What are the techniques and practices used? To relate the research carried out on ESAFAZ with the purpose of this article, it was necessary to highlight, with the theoretical foundation of great authors on the subject, what are the main aspects and the importance of organizational learning for an institution, so that it is possible to understand the context and the challenges faced by ESAFAZ. As the objective of this work is to study how ESAFAZ has reinvented itself, and if it was possible to maintain the capabilities and which techniques and practices were and are being applied in the new organizational moment, the theoretical foundation of the article was structured in the following topics: organizations, management of the knowledge and organizational learning. The motivators that led the authors to arouse interest in research began with the need to have a study of this new organizational environment. The culture suddenly imposed on organizations and, in this case, on corporate schools, brought permanent changes. According to Braga (2020), the impacts of the Coronavirus outbreak are still incalculable. However, it is certain that this changed the work dynamic, demanding new habits from corporations, including differentiated management models.

Companies that were afraid of remote work were forced to adopt this solution, which has proven to be efficient, or at least the best option for the moment. This, however, has put companies that traditionally have a culture of power and control to the test (BRAGA, 2020). In this sense, ESAFAZ presented and promoted a change in organizational culture without restraint or fear. The leaders needed to innovate and develop more accurate communications, transparency and alignment with the teams, now decentralized, were essential to maintain the commitments. This challenge was the first motivator of the research. The second opportunity for the study was the form and possibility of replicating the processes and gains in other organizations. Are the practices replicable? Can we pass them on as good practices? Here, good practices are defined as those techniques that are identifiable as the best to perform a given task. (GOOD PRACTICES, 2020). In this universe, knowing whether research applied to the farm school would have been a success case and making this study feasible for other organizations became stimulating. Identify whether ESAFAZ has more modern management practices, different actions, in addition to ideas and solutions adapted to the moment of pandemic with social isolation in order to bring disruptive models that provided more agile and assertive responses during the crisis.

The article is divided into 5 sections. The first is the introduction and context of the research. The second will address the theoretical references covering texts and articles relevant to the bibliography. The third deals with the methods and steps taken in the research. The fourth section presents the results obtained after the qualitative analysis of the study. Finally, the fifth and last section brings the authors' final considerations on the analysis proposed here. The exposition of the reasons shown above reveals the importance, originality and feasibility of this research. Its implementation may come to remedy the gap in studies on the subject, and meet possible expectations of the Government and public servants, in addition to, finally, trying to bring answers and guidance to public managers for its practical application. This research is justified both from an organizational and academic point of view. In addition to the current strong requirement of having an effective, efficient and quality public service (SEPLAG, 2020), the current event of the pandemic on a global and local scale has leveraged the speed of technological and cultural growth and development of this generation (LIMA, 2020).

Contributions of the Theoretical Framework

Given the environmental dynamics, it is necessary to have adaptive capacity in order to survive and develop. The organizational world maintains this need, as institutions need to have the ability to learn to stand out in the face of change:

"Organizations may not have brains, but they do have cognitive systems and memories; develop routine, relatively standardized procedures for dealing with internal and external problems. These routines are incorporated, explicitly or unconsciously, in organizational memory" (FLEURY and FLEURY, 2001, p. 193).

That is, through lived experiences, organizations, through their individuals and routines, tacitly or expressly, are able to develop and store problem solving methods. Although the authors defend that organizations do not have brains, it is possible to understand it as a system of several mini brains that, together, form a single company thought, as each individual can be the starting point for organizational learning. According to Silva, Felix and Autran (2020), "the promotion of knowledge takes place from the social interactions of individuals in obtaining experiences that start to direct them towards the organization, moving towards the organizational knowledge stage, promoting social networks of learning". Therefore, from social interactions, individual knowledge can be transformed into organizational knowledge. In this context, knowledge management becomes increasingly essential to the organization, given that its management can be a crucial factor for institutional development.

With the growing importance of Knowledge Management, companies start to worry about what they know, what they need to know and, not least, what the competition knows. It becomes increasingly important to identify the impact and consistency of knowledge in the specific sector of the company. It is, therefore, essential to create conditions and support the development and communication of this knowledge. The company begins to realize the importance of transforming its knowledge really into an asset at the service of the organization, and not just owned by individuals or internal groups (TEIXEIRA FILHO, 2000, p.41).

It is evident that knowledge management goes beyond internal limits and assumes a macro proportion, as it is not only necessary to provide an environment that promotes the internal flow of learning, but also to control what information is going to the external environment. As well as seeking to understand the knowledge of other stakeholders to better manage the strategic chain. In this way, knowledge management becomes a source of competitive advantage, thus seeking to meet the needs of organizational actors meeting the demands for information and knowledge (SILVA HEIDE, 2007). According to Bukowitz and Williams (2002), wealth happens when knowledge is used by the organization to create value for the customer. Although knowledge in the contemporary market is configured as a competitive advantage, adding value to organizations, knowledge is multidimensional and complex. This characteristic is incumbent on the organizations' managers to seek ways to raise their sharing and their applicability (SILVA; BURGER, 2018). Thus, knowledge management is not a simple task, due to the need to establish a culture of sharing and learning. Therefore, the establishment of this culture is faced with some obstacles, such as the perception of individuals that the distribution of their knowledge to others will result in a loss of importance for the information holder. According to Silva Heide (2007), knowledge sharing is often understood as a loss of intellectual property or power vis-à-vis other people in the organization. However, in reality this sharing will substantially help the interaction between people and individual and organization growth. Therefore, it is important to show individuals that when sharing, the individual still holds the primacy of their experience, their know-how, which is personal and non-transferable. In this scenario, it is necessary to establish an organizational culture so that people can better understand what is proposed in knowledge management, as well as understand the importance of knowledge sharing. Both tacit and explicit knowledge can benefit from social interaction, in a "win-win" relationship. For this, having a collective learning project in the organization, bringing different actors together, is fundamental (STRAUHS ET AL., 2012). According to Valentim (2002), one or more individuals in the organization always provide their experiences, beliefs, values, etc., and the complexity lies in absorbing this tacit knowledge to the organizational universe.

However, knowledge management is not an end in itself, but a means of acquiring organizational learning, becoming a practice, thus becoming a competitive advantage. "The main activities related to Knowledge Management, in general, are: sharing knowledge internally; update, process and apply knowledge for some organizational benefit" (TEIXEIRA FILHO, 2000, p.157). Some authors distinguish the concepts of information management and knowledge management, such as Silva, Felix and Autran (2020), who defend information management as understanding the need for the environment in which the organization is located, and using management mechanisms to improve the performance of its acquisition, storage, retrieval and use, to build an intelligent organization that constantly seeks knowledge, learning and innovation. On the other hand, knowledge management is the process in which individuals share their intellectual capital acquired through information and experience, with the aim of generating improvements and innovations for the organization. This competitive differential generated by innovation is a pacified consensus. Acordant Strauhs et al. (2012), "there is a direct relationship between information, knowledge and innovation. Furthermore, the greater the company's capacity to innovate more and better, the greater will be its competitive advantage". These authors argue that valuing different

experiences and knowledge, encouraging sharing, even with the recognition that there are potential problems of competition between people, is also a step towards overcoming obstacles. Therefore, plurality, through knowledge sharing, provides learning that will generate innovation, placing the organization at a different level compared to its competitors. However, in addition to tacit and informal knowledge, it is also healthy to consider the relevance of explicit and formal learning. In this sense, the concept of corporate education emerges, which is "a process that systematizes, streamlines, creates and provides conditions for implementing guidelines and business development" (PACHECO ET AL., 2009, p.30). According to Mauricio, Vieira and Bido (2019), the traditional Training and Development developed in a deeper and more strategic perspective, becoming corporate education. Given that ESAFAZ, the object of study of this research, is a corporate school, its sense of existence reflects this concept. Therefore, corporate education aims to develop learning processes in order to enhance the skills, abilities and attitudes of employees (GARAVAN; O'CINNEIDE, 1994). In other words, corporate schools have as their greatest priority the generation of knowledge, from the training of norms instructions and work activities to the contribution to strategic planning, with regard to the area of organizational learning. Therefore, institutions must invest in their collaborators and provide a sharing culture, so that this environment conducive to organizational learning can translate into innovation and, consequently, competitive advantage. That is, organizations must understand the intellectual capital of their members not only for what is already established in their prior knowledge, their legitimacy lies in inserting and understanding the constant learning process, to establish itself in the organizational culture as a strategic resource for innovation (BUKOWITZ; WILLIAMS, 2002).

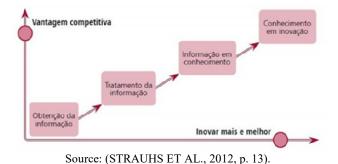


Figure 1. Relationship between competitive advantage and ability to innovate

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The main objective of this article is to analyze the actions taken by the Pernambuco Farm School (ESAFAZ), during the outbreak of COVID-19, to adapt to the pandemic reality and generate organizational learning. The purpose of the Escola Farmária is to plan, coordinate, program, organize, execute and evaluate activities related to the training and professional development of the farm staff, comprising, in particular, training, improvement specialization programs. This study seeks to understand how ESAFAZ continued to fulfill its mission of training the various state treasury workers during the 2020 global pandemic. The study aims to analyze which tools were adopted and how organizational learning continued to take place amidst social isolation, needed for so many months. The organization aims to encourage the development of the potential and values necessary to achieve the skills of finance and citizenship. Seeking to be recognized for excellence in the construction and dissemination of knowledge for the improvement of ESAFAZ and society (ESAFAZ, 2020). In this context, it is noteworthy that the State of Pernambuco has a corporate education program, with ESAFAZ being one of the schools that make up this program. It is a unit within the Secretariat of Finance of Pernambuco that has been in existence for 27 years and currently has a team of

eleven people, including its own servants, transferred and commissioned servants. The research is of an applied nature, as, according to Gil (2019), it encompasses studies designed with the purpose of solving problems identified in the context of societies in which researchers live. Applied research focuses on the problems present in the activities of institutions, organizations, groups or social actors. She is engaged in making diagnoses, identifying problems and finding solutions. It responds to a demand formulated by "clients, social actors or institutions" (THIOLLENT, 2009, p.36). The objective is exploratory and descriptive, with a qualitative approach, because in qualitative studies, data are used to generate descriptions, concepts and theories, and not to prove, test or validate pre-existing conceptions. Therefore, these studies are guided by the principle of fitting theories to the data and not the opposite. (FREITAS, 2013). In this article, the data collected were used to understand, through a case study, how ESAFAZ managed to reinvent itself and continue training the various farm servers that it serves, in the midst of the pandemic. To this end, the use of new techniques and practices was analyzed (such as lives, distance courses, live courses through virtual platforms, etc.) and the respective process of change and organizational learning. Data collection was carried out through an unstructured interview with the direction and technical team of the corporate school in October 2020. According to Lakatos and Marconi (2020), the interview is a meeting between two people, so that one of them, through conversation, obtain information about a certain subject. It is a procedure used in social investigation, for data collection, or to aid in the diagnosis or treatment of a social problem. As an auxiliary, support materials produced by ESAFAZ were used, such as a website, management reports and spreadsheets with the numbers obtained in the trainings (hours of training, number of employees trained, number of courses carried out, overall average grade of the courses performed, among others).

RESULTS

Acting with the focus of promoting the Corporate Education of the 1,400 servers Secretariat of Finance of Pernambuco, ESAFAZ develops its practices and projects through development and training actions to strengthen the Secretariat's beliefs and values. The sharing of goals and targets set and the continuous generation of knowledge over time has strengthened the Secretariat and the School as a whole. Great challenges were faced, especially regarding the financial crisis that hit Brazil and the state of Pernambuco, and this led ESAFAZ to seek ways to help fulfill and strengthen the ultimate goals in the state tax collection, through corporate educational support. The School had already been working on the conception, implementation and evaluation of an organizational climate survey (called PCO), which unfolded into Sectorial Workshops (debates on the results, opinions and suggestions registered by the participants) and Action Plans (actions to remedy the situations described and improve the work environment). Strategic Coffees with the Boards of the Tax Administration Coordination (CAT) and the State Treasury Control Coordination (CTE) began to be periodically promoted by the School, with meetings aimed at aligning the expectations of the boards in relation to development actions of the teams and their respective leaders. It is noteworthy that ESAFAZ is part of the Corporate Education Program of the State of Pernambuco, being one of the most active Corporate Schools, and currently has an average of forty instructors, fifteen distance course tutors and five coordinators, who work in the carrying out and in the logistics of all training and development actions for employees promoted by the School. The technical staff of the School, together with the instructors and tutors, develops, from teaching materials and handouts, to video classes, recordings and other actions that are necessary for the progress of the courses, offered according to the demands of the Department of Finance (SEFAZ) in each time course. ESAFAZ is also present in addition to Corporate Education, being demanded as an important partner in various actions and initiatives of other directors and units of SEFAZ, in addition to participating in external partnerships, such as holding state meetings between coordinators and instructors of State Corporate Schools, formulation of joint training with other Schools, such as the Civil Police Academy (ACADEPOL), in a recent initiative to train SEFAZ employees in tax investigation, and also participating in actions and lectures on people development throughout the country, being a case of reference and good practices in Corporate Education in Pernambuco. Since 2019, the School has been going through major challenges, starting with the replacement of a large part of its technical work team - when it needed to readjust to the loss of experienced collaborators - and then when it had to change its physical address, as a result of a strategic repositioning within SEFAZ. Currently, the biggest challenge for the School's management was when faced with the pandemic brought about by the COVID-19 outbreak, messing with the entire programming and planning of the development actions that had been carried out. Despite all these factors, the ESAFAZ team chose to reinvent itself, understanding that new ways needed to be found so that the School's actions could reach its servers. For this, it took a lot of courage, collective effort and great capacity for innovation, and so it happened, through several successful practices and actions. Since the School adopted new postures and did not need to renounce its quality or its main purpose - construction and dissemination of knowledge to improve SEFAZ and society - we will cite here some highlights of the performance of the technical staff and the great gains and benefits achieved. Knowing that the organizational learning of the SEFAZ staff needed to continue, and also knowing the importance of knowledge management of this staff for the evolution of the Secretariat as a whole (since knowledge must first be made available and acquired, and then must be multiplied and accessible to everyone in the organization), ESAFAZ understood that it needed to change its annual training plan and sought alternatives that required its team new skills and new ways of thinking about its products to make the School's training and actions accessible and attractive, even being physically distant from all servers. The first step was to train the School's technical team and its body of instructors, tutors and course coordinators on the new tools and technologies that would be used.

Taking into account the aspects described above, we see that ESAFAZ was already concerned with bringing new alternatives for training and leading the development of its servers, as well as recording in repositories all the learning and information generated and acquired by and through them (practicing knowledge management). When, once again, the School needed to reinvent itself in this pandemic, it went for accessible and assertive solutions, which would effectively reach its servers profile, even amidst so many restrictions brought about by isolation. The School's main concern was that the results and mission of SEFAZ would not fail to be fulfilled or achieved (in this case, the collection of state taxes – source of many of the resources for the Government of Pernambuco). In the preparations for the demobilization of SEFAZ's staff, there was great effort and care from SCI - Executive Secretariat for Institutional Coordination regarding the planning, preparation, execution and support of the tasks related to all remote work to be performed, offering the necessary and possible conditions for the continuity of its mission, in order to reduce possible financial and functional losses resulting from the drop in state tax revenue. Knowing that organizational culture is something extremely important and determinant for the learning process in an institution, the management of ESAFAZ (which had already been listening and working on improving SEFAZ's organizational culture) chose to focus its training actions in accordance with the culture the location, adapting the projects and initiatives to its target audience, which were built together with the staff itself, in order to think of suggestions and solutions that are crucial for the success of the institution's various processes.

Among the outstanding actions taken by ESAFAZ during the pandemic, the following stand out:

Creation of the "Minuto de Conhecimento" Project, with a
focus on providing guidance for remote creation of Distance
Education content, through an explanatory booklet on how to
use the various electronic equipment available for content
production today. The booklet explains, in detail, how podcasts

- and videos in general (whether on cell phones or using tools such as *Loom* and *OBS Studio Software*) can be produced, enabling the servers themselves to share information between them, multiplying knowledge in the Institution;
- The creation of Podcasts with summaries of topics and important guidelines for the various leaderships of the Secretariat, in order to keep team managers motivated, informed, oriented and trained to take on the new forms and methods of collection that needed to be adopted;
- Booklet with a survey of 156 (one hundred and fifty-six) free online courses - and their respective email addresses - that could be made for SEFAZ servers, already filtered according to the specialties required by the target audience of Secretariat employees;
- Creation and realization of remote training in various themes, which enabled the approximation and union of servers from the various Regional Offices of SEFAZ (Metropolitan Region of Recife, Agreste and Sertão) at the same time, so that knowledge could be uniformly passed on, in addition to sharing of general guidelines;
- Realization of meetings and virtual meetings, live, with the
 directors and their teams from the different Units of SEFAZ,
 enabling the monitoring and adjustment of the route, in time, of
 all actions and results generated by the staff and the approach of
 leaders and led:
- Renewal and expansion of the School's instructor staff, bringing new actors and characters to create content and share their knowledge through distance training.

The aforementioned actions generated interesting results for the School, which trained around 2,023 (two thousand and twenty-three) employees until November 6, 2020, in 46 (forty-six) different courses. In addition, there was a big break in paradigms regarding the engagement of servers in the distance modality (EaD). Culturally, SEFAZ did not have the adhesion of its staff regarding actions and training in the Distance Learning (EaD) modality, but with the pandemic, several auditors who work on duty became participative and praised the School's initiatives, joining remote actions and classifying them as very productive and important. It is worth mentioning that the management of ESAFAZ received reports from auditors that the changes that took place, in particular the training program implemented by the Financial and Administrative Board, reached everyone, mainly because SEFAZ has Units spread throughout the state of Pernambuco (coastal, agreste and sertão), as well as auditors residing in other states. The School received very positive feedbacks, given the scope of actions for everyone, and in a homogeneous way. It is still relevant to mention that the meetings were moments of great learning for everyone. The socialization of activities and the tacit knowledge acquired in each new routine and work process made the activities transparent, captivating and democratic at SEFAZ.

CONCLUSION

As we have seen, knowing, understanding and respecting the organizational culture of a company is essential, and establishing a favorable climate for learning in it, so that people can always be open to better understand and practice knowledge management, is fundamental. Understanding the importance and practicing knowledge sharing (tacit and explicit), building a legacy and bringing evolution and perpetuity to an organization, is fundamental for growth and maturation. Having a collective organizational learning project, bringing different actors together and making the generation and access to this knowledge tangible at any time, is a sine qua non for the success of any organization. It is also known that organizational learning leads to the development of new processes, new projects and new solutions, which bring greater credibility and sustainability to an organization, making it achieve better results. Furthermore, we have seen that learning is a social process, as individuals or groups never learn on their own, and that they will always be in a constant dialogical relationship, which leads them to

an exchange of information and experiences for their own development. ESAFAZ, in facing this new reality brought about by the pandemic, managed to reinvent itself and has been seeking to fulfill its mission of efficiently and competently serving its clientele: farm servants. Through innovative solutions, the preparation of its technical staff, educational products built together with new actors and knowledge sharers, and also with the support of leaders from the various areas of SEFAZ, it managed to continue supporting the smooth functioning of the Secretariat, reaching the areas of Recife (metropolitan region) and the entire interior of the state. The School has been facing this great challenge with a lot of motivation, innovation and optimism, aiming to broadly meet the demands of qualification and reinvention of its target audience. staff and management are fully committed and committed to overcoming challenges, discovering and improving methods to train and propose new understandings of daily life in meeting the educational needs of all SEFAZ employees. The successful actions narrated in this study show that it is possible to train servants in the midst of the pandemic, through techniques and discovered practices, adapted and built with many hands, with a strong team and collective spirit, and always with a focus on fulfilling the main mission of SEFAZ. The actions taken could even serve as references of good practices for the other Corporate Schools of the State Executive Power and even for other Federal Units in the country.

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