Abstract

The paper analyzed, in two periods, the challenges and perspectives in the working life of professors who carried out telework during the COVID-19 pandemic, with professors from the Federal University of Grande Dourados (UFGD). A questionnaire on the Google platform was used to collect data in two moments of the pandemic. The results showed the possibility of continuing remote work, but alternating between remote and full-time. Since step 1, five months after the start of the pandemic, and step 2, in 2022, teachers readjusted many situations to face the times of pandemic and remote work/teaching. Positive aspects were facilities brought by remote work and the low incidence of contagion. They suggest the institution to improve assistance on virtual platforms and training, because 58% want full or partial continuity of remote activities.

Keywords: Professors. Higher Education. Pandemics. Learning. Training.

1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic affected the world, affecting many economic, cultural, social, and educational activities. On January 30, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared that the disease caused by the new coronavirus (Sars-Cov-2) (COVID-19) was a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. The institution characterized it as a pandemic with high levels of
infectivity and geographic spread (PAHO/WHO, 2020). This forced the affected countries to implement a series of measures to prevent the spread of the virus and its rapid advance (Kupferschmidt; Cohen, 2020).

The impact of the pandemic and the adoption urgent measures in the daily lives of societies has brought to light challenges related to the format of work and the demand for telework, popularly known as home office or remote work. In the educational context at all levels, face-to-face activities were either transformed into remote activities or suspended. Suspended activities were later resumed mostly gaining new configurations of remote work. Finally, work activities once again took place via the face-to-face mode or via a hybrid mode. Organizations quickly improved their remote collaboration capabilities. Video conferencing, special deliveries, online shopping, e-commerce, and many other information technology processes replaced the traditional way of working practices (Savić, 2020).

Nilles (1975) brought the term home office or telecommuting, called telework in Brazil. It described as the way to make the work reach the worker without him/her going to the workplace (Rabelo, 2000). This form of work is developed using information and communication technologies (ICTs) and involves economic, social, organizational, environmental, and legal aspects (Sakuda; Vasconcelos, 2005). The orientations and prescriptions of the economic/commercial field and the changes in the political scene resulting from the transformations of the globalized world in the last decades have marked the advance of ICTs. These technologies began to assume an increasingly significant role in the modernization of public administration. The aim of ICTs is to offer a comprehensive, professional, efficient public service focused on meeting the specific needs of citizens (Oliveira; Pantoja, 2018).

Information and communication technologies have brought significant changes in the public sector. This is because ICTs can increase the mobility of actions in this sector. For Oliveira and Pantoja (2018, p. 1664) “telework seems to arise in public organizations as a consequence of technological innovations and as a practice capable of reconciling cost reduction, increased productivity, and personal satisfaction”. On the other hand, these authors note that, in Brazil, the adoption of this work regime in the public sector is still incipient and lacks systematic normative regulation as well as a consolidated field of scientific production. Therefore, with the Coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic, federal universities migrated from face-to-face work to remote work or home office abruptly. This did not occur only in the public sector but also in the private sector.
In this context, on May 17, 2022, Decree No. 11,072 was published which provides for the implementation of the Management and Performance Program (PDG) of the direct, autonomous, and foundational federal public administration. This instrument governs the development and measurement of telework activities, focusing on delivery by results and the quality of public services provided to society (Brasil, 2022).

In the context of educational institutions, especially of Higher Education, this scenario triggers developments in management and planning and in work behavior, as well as significant changes in the dynamics of teaching, research, and extension activities. Researchers thus conducted studies with the aim of demonstrating the panorama of changes that teachers have incorporated in their work dynamics in recent times. For example, Bezerra et al. (2020) aimed to identify and discuss the offer of remote teaching in state public universities in Brazil. The authors conducted this study in June 2020, beginning of pandemic time and showed that many institutions were offering part of their activities (47.5%) via remote work, while other institutions were still organizing and planning their classes. Saraiva, Traversini and Lockmann (2020) analyzed the discursive plot arising from the need to adapt face-to-face activities to remote activities, focusing on the teaching work. These authors used empirical material from a newspaper and from websites of gaucho unions in the category. They reported a constant demand for unrestricted availability of teachers in these pandemic times. According to the authors, the difficulty in balancing teaching activities and managing this moment ended up generating stress and anxiety.

The adoption of telework can be positive for organizations, requiring deeper studies to measure financial indicators and the results achieved in this type of work (Tokarchuk; Gabriele; Neglia, 2021). This is even more important in an educational context, in which the main objective of the teacher is to teach. In the case of teachers, their stress levels in telework may be because they need to seek solutions so that each student acquires knowledge and develops competences and cognitive skills (Tanus; Sánchez-Tarragó, 2020). This phenomenon demands investigation regarding the telework effectiveness in a Higher Education institution, implying a review of its policies, processes, practices, and work routines considering the need for social isolation.

This study analyzed two periods regarding the challenges and perspectives in the working life of teachers who teleworked at the Federal University of Grande Dourados (UFGD) during the COVID-19 pandemic. This proposal is the continuation of a research started in 2020 with partial data (Araújo et al., 2021).
Studies on telework in public administration are still scarce. In contrast, one can find a relatively large number of studies on this matter in the private sector (Filardi; Castro; Zanini, 2020). In this perspective, this research brings a wider view of the reality of telework of federal university professors. The impacts and the very functioning of this modality of work raise tempestuous issues to organizational and personal aspects, which can add to the debate and understanding of the phenomenon (Vilarinho; Paschoal; Demo, 2021).

2 Telework

The concept of telework has several definitions (Rocha; Amador, 2018). To illustrate this concept, it is necessary to rescue the term telecommuting that originally refers to the exchange of means of employee transport to work by means of data communication, which transport the work to the employee (Gaspar et al., 2011). Previously restricted to traditional workplaces, the workspace is now virtual and can be anywhere on the planet, leaving aside the geographic limits of organizations. At the same time, this situation brings other demands to organizations. Some examples are the adjustments in administrative practices including task planning, task division, employee training, relationship with teleworkers, labor control, among others (Nohara et al., 2010).

Telework have three forms: fixed telework with employee do most of their work at home or in shared offices; mobile telework, the employee works most of their time in different locations or in the field; and flexible telework, the teleworker can work in different environments, including at home and in the field (Garrett; Danziger, 2007). The various descriptions of telework have common elements in their meanings. These include the flexibility of work environments and the replacement of the employee’s displacement to the traditional workspace by the use of information technology tools that allow communication to occur remotely (Rocha; Amador, 2018). Teleworking is a way of working that allows employees to be away from the central office (Thye et al., 2012). This type of work has attracted the attention of several countries, even before the COVID-19 pandemic. However, although teleworking has existed for some time, it was still an arrangement little used and little debated in Brazilian organizations, especially in the public sector (Vilarinho; Paschoal; Demo, 2021).

Society can benefit from teleworking with better environmental conditions due to less vehicle traffic and, consequently, less congestions (Thye et al., 2012). Among the impacts of teleworking during the pandemic time in several parts of the world is the reduction of environmental noise (Andargie; Touchie; O’Brien, 2021). The advantages of teleworking refer to savings for organizations, the
reduction of travel costs for the employee, the possibility of continuing work even in adverse conditions, the better balance between professional and personal life. Notwithstanding, these positive points should not conceal the challenges that can take place in this type of work. The benefits that come from teleworking also have some limitations (Mahler, 2012) such as technical difficulties, information technology infrastructure factors in the development of remote work, problems related to social interaction (Vilarinho; Paschoal; Demo, 2021), people management practices and policies (Oliveira; Pantoja, 2020), among others.

Teleworking brings possibilities for improvement for all agents involved, both for employees and for organizations (Cifarelli; Souza, 2016). However, organizational leaders may not recognize the long-term challenges presented by teleworking and may focus more on the short-term advantages that this type of work can present, such as greater productivity (Taskin; Bridoux, 2010). The quick and unexpected implementation of remote work allowed organizations to continue their activities during the pandemic period, providing greater security to their employees even if in an improvised way. Notwithstanding, from the workers’ point of view, a new way of working emerged that brought advantages but also problems, as professional and family life began to merge in time and space (Chahad, 2021).

It is important to consider the possible negative effects of teleworking, especially in the medium or long term. Still, also important is the analysis of possible long-term benefits, such as the mileage that these employees stop covering in their daily lives (Nguyen, 2021). From the point of view of telework, the autonomous individual is the main factor of the relationship with the organization, an essential element that needs to be assisted by it. This situation needs to be included in organizational strategic planning, with the institution encouraging self-knowledge and individual emancipation of the teleworker (Bueno; Salvagni, 2016).

In the market logic, in which new technologies demand more competitiveness, effectiveness, and efficiency from workers – that is, greater attention to results –, teleworking as a means of institutional development (Nogueira Filho et al., 2020). Managers thus need a strategic look, capable of analyzing the environmental contingencies related to this policy or way of working (Pereira et al., 2021).

The introduction of digital devices in the teaching and learning process brings the creation of a new educational environment. Classrooms replaced by bedrooms, dining rooms, study rooms, among others, and physical contact among colleagues
and teachers is limited only to family contact (Gordón, 2020). Remote teaching thus brings several challenges for teachers, introducing them to a new pace of work and a new organizational culture (Castioni et al., 2021). From this experience of teleworking due to the new coronavirus pandemic arises an incentive to adopt defensive strategies (Hopkins; Mckay, 2019).

In the pandemic, teleworking established as a tool to protect health while preserving the economy. However, organizations implemented teleworking in a perspective that not even institutions and employees were able to adapt to this change beforehand (Torres, 2021). Lack of planning for changes in work routines required impact mitigation actions taken quickly and subsequently to this new reality (Okano et al., 2020). The learning process became a challenge for the entire educational community (Gordón, 2020). It is still too early to say what changes will remain, since the pandemic is not over yet. Notwithstanding, it is possible to infer that teleworking will continue as a strategy to prevent or mitigate health uncertainties. Another hypothesis is that a part of teleworking will continue even with the end of the pandemic, given the benefits that some organizations are presenting. However, some of the advantages must be analyzed in contrast to the impacts generated by this new reality in the lives of workers (Benavides et al., 2021), especially concerned to possibility of overload in activities that could lead to the risk of illness (Velasco; Pantoja; Oliveira, 2023).

3 The Federal University of Grande Dourados and measures in the face of the pandemic

The Federal University of Grande Dourados (UFGD) created by Law No. 11,153 of July 29, 2005 (Brasil, 2005), in Dourados city, Mato Grosso do Sul State, Brazil. Before that, it belonged to the Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul, acting as a university center since 1971. From the Program to Support Restructuring and Expansion Plans of Federal Universities (Reuni), enacted by Decree No. 6,096 (Brasil, 2007), UFGD began to be an independent institution. It thus started offering a new range of undergraduate and postgraduate courses, expanding its infrastructure and its teaching and technical-administrative staff. The structure of the UFGD comprises 12 faculties, with 45 undergraduate courses (on-campus + distance Education) and 34 postgraduate courses. The institution has around 586 professors, 886 administrative technical staff, and 6,437 undergraduate students (UFGD, 2021).

Faced with the pandemic, the Rectory of UFGD appointed the Emergency Operating Committee (COE/UFGD) in accordance with Ordinance No. 190 of March 12,
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2020 (UFGD, 2020a), complying with the MEC Ordinance No. 329 of March 11, 2020 (Brasil, 2020). Moreover, the Rectory/UFGD Ordinance No. 201 of March 17, 2020 (UFGD, 2020b), recomposed the aforementioned Committee for the addition of members. The COE/UFGD constitutes a commission of employees with the objective of defining prevention strategies against the disease within the academic community. The group consists of representatives from different sectors. Teaching activities were suspended for one month on March 17, 2020. The activities suspended for an indefinite period, and all employees began to work remotely.

Classes resumed on August 3, 2020, under the Emergency Academic Regime, in accordance with Resolution No. 106 of June 29, 2020 (UFGD, 2000c). The academic year resumed in February 2021, however still with remote classes. Face-to-face activities returned in February 2022 in accordance with Resolution No. 279 of January 24, 2022 (UFGD, 2022a), which approved the resumption of classes and other didactic-pedagogical activities at UFGD in the face-to-face modality, and with Resolution No. 281 of January 26, 2022 (UFGD, 2022b), which authorized teachers and students in specified risk situations to remain in the remote modality. It was only on June 6, 2022, that all activities took place in person again due to the provisions of Normative Instruction No. 36 of May 5, 2022, of the Ministry of Economy, and Normative Instruction No. 09 of May 12, 2022, of the Rectory/UFGD (UFGD, 2022c).

As an action by COE/UFGD, Notice No. 1 was published together with PROGRAD, PROPP, and PROEX for the selection of project proposals and actions aimed at combating COVID-19 and the consequences of the pandemic. These proposals and actions should include teaching, research, innovation, and extension modalities, in the various areas of knowledge. The results of this research are part of the project submitted to this notice.

4 Methodological procedures

This is a descriptive research with quantitative analysis involving professors of UFGD. The data collection instrument was a questionnaire based on the literature review, the personal experiences of the authors with teleworking, and the experiences answering research questionnaires on this topic during the pandemic period.

Step 1 of the questionnaire had 36 closed questions and 1 open question with no mandatory answer so that the respondent could share their opinion and personal experience on adherence to telework in the context of the COVID-19
Pandemic. The questionnaire addressed to: the respondents profile; the context involving telework in the perspectives of management and access to technology (systematization of actions, internet structure, ability, and challenges); workspace (physical space and restricted environment); work organization (schedule, performance, achievement of goals, separation from family and professional life); and the emotional side (feelings regarding the performance of the activity and the achievement of goals, isolation, insecurities). The questionnaire was pretested with four professors from the institution. Contributions received and incorporated at the questionnaire. For analyzes we used descriptive statistic for quantitative data and for the open question, we analyzed the frequency of words and brought some speeches in the results.

According to the UFGD Management Report (2020), the effective teaching staff in 2019 had 594 professionals. In step 1, the questionnaire was sent to all UFGD professors between August 1 and September 15, 2020, via the Google platform to their institutional email. We send a message explaining the objectives of the project and inviting them to participate. Firstly, we contacted the university’s communication sector that sent it to all professors at three different times. We contacted the directors of academic units, pro-rectors, and coordinators of undergraduate and postgraduate courses in an attempt to encourage participation. We got 105 responses, with a percentage of participation in the survey of 18%.

Step 2 took place in the first quarter of 2022 with a new data collection involving the same number of professors. This questionnaire had 13 closed questions aimed at understanding their experience during the pandemic and their prospect of return. Some questions about personal profile, management and access to technology, work organization, and the future prospects maintained. At this step, we obtained 162 responses from professors. The application followed the same form as in step 1. We analyzed first data from step 1, considering the defined categories, gathered in a spreadsheet, treated, and presented in figures with graphics and descriptive statistical analysis. The analysis in step 2 followed the same systematics, comparing results. The description of results includes data from the two steps, considering the entirety of step 2 and part of step 1.

5 Results and discussion

This topic will present data from the two steps, making some comparisons in relation to personal profile, management and access to technology, work organization, and future prospects.
5.1 Profile of professors

As for the profile of respondents, 51% were female and 49% male; 74% were married or in a stable relationship; 17% were single; and 9% were divorced, separated, or widowed. Figure 1 shows the age range of the participants.

**Figure 1 - Graphic Age of respondents**

Most of the federal university professors has from 30 to 60 years old. Of the total respondents, 91% have a doctor’s degree and 8% have a master’s degree. As the structure of the university consists of faculties, 99% of the respondents work in these places. The others are professors occupying management positions in the Rectory and in administrative or supplementary bodies outside the faculties. As for the time working in the public service, most of the respondents (31%) had 05 to 10 years of professional exercise. It is noteworthy that UFGD has been in existence for 17 years and has joined the Reuni Program in 2009. This culminated in the creation of new undergraduate courses in the last decade and the opening of selection processes for the admission of new professors. Figure 2 shows the average gross income of the professors interviewed.
Most of these professors have a doctor’s or master’s degree, concentrating in a salary range. Figure 3 shows the number of residents per household of professors.

**Figure 3 - Graphic Number of residents per household**

Source: Research data (2020–2022)
The most predominant answer is two to three people in each household, indicating the presence of children, which, in many cases, may be of school age. These data corroborate the findings of Saraiva, Traversini and Lockmann (2020), highlighting the need for teachers to arrange the numerous activities in telework. In addition, there is a greater number of interruptions and reduce the concentration with children at home while carrying out work (Velasco, Pantoja; Oliveira, 2023).

In step 1, none of the respondents was diagnosed with COVID-19, but 71% of them knew family members or friends who were diagnosed with the disease. In step 2, 25% of respondents contaminated with the Coronavirus; 6% had not been tested but suspected to have it.

5.2 Management and access to technology

In step 1, due to the need for social isolation, 43% of professors evaluated the support given by the institution for remote work to be carried out as insufficient. Another 46% classified it as partially sufficient because there was training but not enough for them to feel safe with remote work. Some professors (11%) stated that the institution provided full support for the development of works in the virtual environment. Virtual platforms represented challenges for some professors (Figure 4).

Figure 4 - Graphic Perception on the use of virtual platforms

Source: Research data (2020–2022)
Professors mostly perceive the use of virtual platforms for the development of remote work as regular. Such a perspective can be justified because virtual environments are subject to future improvements and adjustments, aiming at the specificities and needs of each type of work. For one interviewee, “remote activity was necessary, but the workload increased a lot”. The open answer space evidences positive and negative aspects in the use of platforms since these tools represent an important support in times of technological innovation in Education.

### 5.3 Work organization and future prospects

Regarding the physical structure available in the households to carry out remote work (Figure 5), 42% of the professors in step 1 and 50% in step 2 had an office or restricted room for the development of work. The others either needed to adapt a space in their homes or used the living room to carry out their activities. These data confirm Gordón (2020), who mentioned the need to adapt spaces for carrying out this type of work.

![Figure 5 - Graphic Physical structure to develop remote work](image)

Source: Research data (2020–2022)

Considering the need to develop professional activities at home, at the same time that primary and secondary schools also adhered to remote teaching, children and young people – including children of professors who responded to this study – had to follow classes and activities in the same residential environment as their parents.
According to Velasco, Pantoja and Oliveira, (2023) for families with children the perception of a physical structure is less suitable for teleworking, and increased workload for their recognition. These aspects reinforce the need to create a new rhythm of work and a new culture (Castioni et al., 2021). Respondents had the opportunity to share their opinions and personal experiences on joining telework in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

When we analyzed some frequent words, they highlighted telework, pandemic, remote, home, teaching, distance, process, internet, among others, corresponding to the feelings of professors in relation to the moment they were living. When comparing the first and second steps, the word “pandemic” does not appear so prominently in the second case. On the other hand, ‘remote’ and ‘activities’ are highlighted with time, assuming work overload in this modality. These terms highlighted the different context experienced by professors, as already indicated by Castioni et al. (2021), as well as the need to measure the financial indicators and results achieved in this type of work (Tokarchuk; Gabriele; Neglia, 2021). Some speeches demonstrated these experiences:

“Remote work allows agility and use of tools that face-to-face work does not allow. It was very important for my subjects”. “Remote work greatly extends work schedules and ends up invading privacy and schedules that are only familiar or individual”. “Since we can be found at any time via messaging apps and phone calls, there are no limits anymore”. “Some experiences that we ‘learned’ from remote work can be incorporated into our routine, such as holding meetings and defense boards in a remote format. This saves us time and money”.

Positive and negative changes arose in the personal and professional perspective (Chahad, 2021) of professors as part of the challenge experienced in the learning process by the entire educational community (Gordón, 2020). These aspects need further evaluation. Figure 6 shows some directions indicated by these professionals when asked about how they would like to carry out their activities after the experience with remote work:
Figure 6 - Graphic Future prospects in relation to work

The data shows possibilities for continuing remote work, but alternating with full-time work. The positive and negative experiences may have led to this new perspective. This is because remote work brought some facilities that could be incorporated into a hybrid modality from the perspective of effectiveness and efficiency in the results (Nogueira Filho et al., 2020) and in the creation of a new organizational culture (Castioni et al., 2021).

6 Final considerations

The article analyzed two periods regarding the challenges and perspectives in the working life of professors who teleworked at the UFGD during the COVID-19 pandemic. The data partly corroborate previous research by indicating aspects related to the need for professors to adapt from a professional and personal perspective. As the research was developed five months after the start of the pandemic (step 1) and in its second year (step 2), professors readjusted many situations to face the times of pandemic and remote work/teaching.

Positive aspects stand out when analyzing data on the advantages of remote work and the low incidence of infection by COVID-19, among other aspects. However, the data also highlight the need for the institution to improve technological assistance to their employees. This is possible both by improving the existing virtual platforms and by offering training.
Bueno and Salvagni (2016) already pointed out the need to include self-knowledge and the individual emancipation of the teleworker in strategic planning. This aspect could not be met due to the way the pandemic showed itself, with organizations having to improvise. However, considering the way this process was incorporated and the period in which it took place, organizations will have to reflect on ways to better build infrastructure and training conditions in case this happens again or in case this type of work remains in a hybrid form. Alves (2020) presented some suggestions when proposing a guide for building a work plan for the Ifes and Ifetecs interested in implementing a management plan that allows for the waiver of attendance control of employees.

In this regard, the Federal University of São Paulo (Unifesp) started in February 2022 the process of implementing the teleworking modality for technical-administrative employees. This process is in accordance with the Management Plan and Normative Instruction Propessoas/Unifesp No. 1/2022, published after studies developed by a commission established for this purpose (Unifesp, 2022). In April of the same year, the Federal University of Rio Grande (Furg) began the public consultation for the implementation of the Management Program based on a study carried out by the Pro-Rectories of Personnel Management and Development and of Innovation and Information Technology (Halal, 2022). The two initiatives may represent the first steps towards a future implementation of the Management and Performance Plan (PDG) also within the scope of teaching staff. The survey showed the interest of 58% of participants in continuing to carry out their activities at UFGD remotely, whether via full-time or part-time activities.

Study limitations include data collection only through a questionnaire, with no possibility of listening to those surveyed with greater contributions. Future research should include a qualitative study with a deeper understanding of issues related to professional experience and future perceptions of work. Another possibility is to identify these same issues with the technical-administrative staff of the same institution of the present study.
Professores universitários: Quais são os desafios e perspectivas da pandemia?

Resumo

O objetivo foi analisar, em dois períodos, os desafios e perspectivas na vida laboral dos docentes que realizaram teletrabalho durante a pandemia da COVID-19, com docentes da Universidade Federal da Grande Dourados (UFGD). Foi utilizado questionário na plataforma Google para coleta de dados em dois momentos da pandemia. Os resultados mostraram possibilidade de continuidade do trabalho remoto, porém com alternância entre remoto e integral. Desde a etapa 1, cinco meses após o início da pandemia e, a etapa 2, em 2022, muitas situações foram sendo readequadas pelos docentes para enfrentar os tempos de pandemia e trabalho/ensino remoto. Aspectos positivos foram as facilidades trazidas pelo trabalho remoto e a pouca incidência de contágio. Sugerem a instituição melhorar a assistência nas plataformas virtuais e capacitações, porque 58% querem a continuidade integral ou parcial das atividades remotas.


Profesores universitarios: ¿Cuáles son los desafíos y perspectivas de la pandemia?

Resumen

El artículo que analizamos, en dos periodos, los desafíos y perspectivas en la vida laboral de los profesores que realizaron teletrabajo durante la pandemia COVID-19, con profesores de la Universidad Federal de Grande Dourados (UFGD). Se utilizó un cuestionario en la plataforma de Google para recopilar datos en dos momentos de la pandemia. Los resultados mostraron la posibilidad de continuar el trabajo remoto, pero alterando entre remoto y tiempo completo. Desde el paso 1, cinco meses después del inicio de la pandemia, y el paso 2, en 2022, los maestros reajustaron muchas situaciones para enfrentar los tiempos de pandemia y trabajo/enseñanza a distancia. Los aspectos positivos fueron las instalaciones aportadas por el trabajo a distancia y la baja incidencia de contagio. Sugieren a la institución mejorar la asistencia en plataformas virtuales y capacitación, porque el 58% quiere continuidad total o parcial de actividades remotas.

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UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DA GRANDE DOURADOS – UFGD.

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UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DA GRANDE DOURADOS – UFGD.


Information about the authors

Erlaine Binotto: Doctor in Agribusiness, Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. Contact: erlainebinotto@ufgd.edu.br

Jane Corrêa Alves Mendonça: Doctor in Business, University of Piracicaba, São Paulo, Brazil. Contact: janemendonca@ufgd.edu.br

João André Amorim Araujo: Master in Public Administration, Federal University of Grande Dourados, Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil. Contact: joaoaraujo@ufgd.edu.br

Roselyn Rodrigues Fountoura: Master in Public Administration, Federal University of Grande Dourados, Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil. Contact: roselynfountoura@ufgd.edu.br

Contribution of the authors: Erlaine Binotto – Project coordination, elaboration of the text, literature review, collected and proposal of interpretative data, general orientation of the theme, discussion of the results and conclusions, critical review of content and revision of versions. Jane Corrêa Alves Mendonça - Elaboration of the text, literature review, active in collect of data, interpretation and discussion of the results and conclusions. João André Amorim Araujo - Active participation in data analysis, literature review, data collect, statistical analysis, elaboration of the text of the statistical analysis, elaboration of figures, conclusions. Roselyn Rodrigues Fountoura - Elaboration of text, literature review and revision.

Data: Considering the characteristics of the data, the entire data set that supports the results of this study was published in the article itself, therefore, when necessary, other researchers can request access directly to the authors.

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