



VOLUNTARY RESIGNATIONS IN TIMES OF COVID-19

RENUNCIAS VOLUNTARIAS EN TIEMPOS DE COVID-19

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ABSTRACT:

Voluntary work resignations are a social problem affecting many Ecuadorian families, putting their quality of life and socioeconomical status at risk. For this reason, the objective of this study is to examine the factors that have influenced voluntary work resignations during the COVID-19 pandemic and establish preventive actions by Human Resources in companies in the city of Quevedo. Additionally, this study will also determine whether these factors have affected the well-being, labor stability, and personal growth of the participants. For this we conducted a questionnaire, given to 203 people who voluntarily resigned from their positions during the pandemic. This was done through an online survey, due to social distancing requirements. The responses collected from the survey informed us about the many factors that influenced participants' decisions to resign from their positions, while highlighting that a main reason was, undoubtedly, fear of contracting COVID-19 at work. This fear was shared even by field professionals who participated in online interviews that we conducted in order to investigate their perspectives on the social impact of this pandemic that has recently affected the economic and social stability and well-being of many families. Moreover, it was established that voluntary work resignations do not always reflect the actual desires of laborers, who wish to improve their quality of life, but instead are a product of outside factors.

Keywords: Voluntary resignations, health emergency COVID-19, prevention, human talent.

RESUMEN:

Las renuncias voluntarias hoy en día pueden presentarse como una problemática social que afecta a muchas familias ecuatorianas poniendo en riesgo la calidad de vida al que por Derecho tenemos todos los seres humanos. Por tal motivo el objetivo del presente estudio fue establecer que factores influyeron en la renuncia voluntaria de los trabajadores durante la emergencia sanitaria del COVID-19 para promover así acciones de prevención desde el Talento Humano en las empresas de la ciudad de Quevedo, además, determinar si estos factores identificados afectaron en el bienestar, la estabilidad laboral y la superación personal de los participantes en estudio. Para ello, aplicamos un cuestionario dirigido a 203 personas que presentaron sus renuncias durante la pandemia, la misma que se ejecutó a través de la encuesta virtual debido al distanciamiento social que debemos cumplir, lo que nos permitió conocer varios factores por el que decidieron poner fin a su relación laboral pero que sin duda alguna acentuaron como mayor relevancia el motivo presentado por el Temor de contagios de COVID-19 en la empresa, conclusión compartida incluso por profesionales en el área laboral a quienes aplicamos entrevistas virtuales para conocer sus perspectivas en cuanto a esta realidad social que ha provocado recientemente la inestabilidad laboral, económica y de bienestar de muchas familias. Sin embargo, se estableció además que la celebración de las renuncias voluntarias no siempre expresa el deseo libre del trabajador que conlleva a mejorar su calidad de vida, sino que resulta por la influencia externa de otros factores.

Palabras clave: Renuncias voluntarias, emergencia sanitaria COVID-19, prevención, talento humano.

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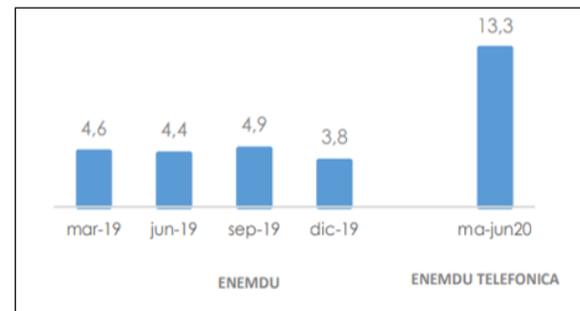
1. INTRODUCTION

Today, the whole world has been affected by a pandemic called COVID-19 that has caused the death of millions of people and affected the economy of many families by the loss of their jobs, something that is related to the statement of the United Nations Organization "It will be the cause of the biggest economic and social crisis in the region in decades, with very negative effects on employment, the fight against poverty and the reduction of inequality." (ECLAC, 2020)

Therefore, the International Labor Organization (ILO), aware of the effects of this virus, recently published a report in which it warns that some 5.3 and 24.7 million jobs would be at risk by the coronavirus, thus exposing "the work force is deeply affected by this global pandemic virus (COVID-19). A situation that in addition to being a threat to public health, economic and social disruptions endanger the long-term livelihoods and well-being of millions of people"; position that serves as a reference at this time with the rise of the unemployment rate at national level to 13.3% during the months of March to June in relation to the previous year 3.8% according

to data from INEC (figure 1), so it is important and essential to ensure the safety of workers, the sustainability of enterprises and jobs, as well as ensuring job stability.

Figure 1. National unemployment rate.



Source: INEC - Technical Bulletin on Employment, emendu telefónica.

In this sense, Gopinath (2020), indicates that "the policy actions to be implemented should aim to prevent this temporary health crisis from having permanent effects on people and companies (unemployment and bankruptcy), seeking to maintain relations between workers and businesses, creditors, debtors, bidders and demanders". However, although it is early to assess the impact of the disease and its effects on the economy of families, some specialists say that these effects will be temporary and anticipate a recovery from the second or third quarter of 2020. Following Gopinath (2020) on the demand side, "both the loss of income as



well as the fear of contagion and increased uncertainty, cause people to spend less, which can cause firms to anticipate lower demand and reduce their spending on investment, exacerbating the closure of businesses or enterprises and the loss of jobs.”

In this context, it is worth mentioning that one of the biggest problems that is becoming more evident in the Ecuadorian society and that constitutes the core of the present study, are the voluntary resignations presented during the health emergency of the COVID-19, which does not exist as a cause for the termination of the work contract but that without any doubt constitutes the employment termination by an agreement between the parties through the legalization of the settlement act where the payment of the labor obligations towards the worker is fulfilled. In other words, when the person voluntarily resigns from his/her job he/she is accepting the cause “agreement between the parties” and has the right to have the company pay him/her a bonus corresponding to 25% of the equivalent of the last monthly remuneration for each of the years of services provided to the same company and

the settlement that the employer prepares through the settlement act, in accordance with the terms of Article 185 of the Labor Code in force and is validated by the Ministry of Labor Relations (MRL).

Nevertheless, although the presentation of voluntary resignations in companies is a formality that expresses the will of the worker before the employer to terminate the work relationship, this is considered and regularized by eviction which does correspond as a cause of right established and protected in the Labor Code of Ecuador indicated in its Art. 184: “It is the written notice with which a worker lets the employer know that his/her will is to terminate the work contract, even by electronic means. Such notice shall be made with at least fifteen days of the definitive cessation of the work, such time period may be reduced by the express acceptance of the employer at the time of the notice.” and that is also related to what was stated by Jácome: “ understood from the scope of the right, the resignation constitutes an act of legal nature and unilateral profile that offers the holder of a right the possibility of withdrawing from it without a certain beneficiary. Resignations are considered to be unilateral because they



only require the will of their author to get rid of a right from his own patrimony.” (2016, p. 48)

However, we cannot ignore that in a direct or indirect manner the decision to end the labor relationship and lose their jobs, whatever the motivation, including the health emergency we are experiencing, is considerably affecting families because they do not have the economic resources necessary to lead a dignified life in full enjoyment of their rights and therefore society, which is contrary to the provisions of the Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador, published in Official Register 449 of October 20, 2008, which states the following:

Art.14.- It is acknowledged the right of the population to live in a healthy and ecologically balanced environment that guarantees sustainability and good living, *sumak kawsay*.

In the same way, as stated on its Art. 66 “the Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador recognizes the right to a dignified life that ensures health, food and nutrition, potable water, housing, environmental sanitation, education, work, employment, rest and leisure, physical culture, clothing, social

security and other necessary social services;”

And also, what is expressed in section eight, Art. 33. “Work is a social right and duty, and an economic right, a source of personal fulfilment and the basis of the economy. The State shall guarantee working people full respect for their dignity, a decent life, fair wages and compensation, and the performance of healthy, freely chosen and accepted work”.

It is in this context and in view of the reality that we live today, that the present investigation emerges to determine the factors that influenced many workers to desist from continuing in the labor relationship, thus presenting their voluntary resignations, which could be the result of the employee's own decision as well as being the result of possible pressure through abuse on the part of the employer and which would constitute a forced resignation under the figure described above, relating it to what was exposed by Paucar “In many cases, the victim will end up getting tired of struggling every day against these injustices and will present his ‘voluntary’ resignation or will simply exteriorize all his/her contained feelings and offend the aggressor, to which



the superiors will ask him/her to leave the organization." (2014, p. 64) which would cause economic destabilization that would directly affect his/her well-being and that of his/her entire family, constituting a social problem currently identified in relation to the health emergency of COVID-19.

Now, while it is true that the unleashed health crisis is putting our societies and economies to the test, in addition to the response that we are all capable of giving in the sense of responsibility that we all have, it is important to limit the containment measures that are leading governments around the world to prioritize and adopt prevention measures that make it possible to slow down the spread and mitigate its effects.

In Ecuador by Ministerial Agreement No. 00126-2020, guidelines are established for the prevention and protection of all workers and public servants against the coronavirus (COVID-19) within working spaces, where general considerations of the virus are established and which have to do with the mode of transmission, incubation period, signs and symptoms; case definitions: suspicious, probable and confirmed cases; as well as the notification of suspicious and

probable cases in the workplace to the national health authority; communication and prevention measures in the workplace, control actions for people with suspected and/or diagnosed coronavirus (COVID-19); and the mandatory preventive isolation, duly certified by the Ministry of Public Health.

Therefore, all sectors of our society, including companies and employers, must play a leading role from the management of Human Talent if we want to stop the spread of this disease and therefore the decrease in voluntary resignations submitted by workers. In this sense, the greater responsibility of management and human talent outline their knowledge and efforts to incorporate preventive actions, developing a special contingency plan and continuity in the company, that allow the worker to be always informed of health recommendations and have the necessary hygiene products as well as the provision of personal protective equipment (hereinafter PPE), considering the diversity of individuals in relation to age, sex, special skills, among others, which will allow the production operation without risking the health of workers thus generating their confidence



and stability. In accordance with what Friedman (2007) states, "strategic planning places managers and chiefs in an analytical point of strategic situations, under a common language and actions, with shared objectives and values", that is, at this point where we are living a health emergency called COVID-19 is important first to make a situational diagnosis of the organization to promote actions that will address possible weaknesses and strengthen opportunities.

In this sense we can also cite, Armas, Y., Llanos, M. & Traverso, P. "Talking about human talent does not mean taking a stand in favor of the staff alone. Human management implies managing each of the participating groups in the production or service area offered through the different organizations with responsibility and impartiality." (2017, p 21). Consequently, we can point out that the action of the companies through the Human Talent must be aligned in legal foundations, linked to the policy of full employment that every State must have in harmony with the legal norms that are enshrined in the Magna Carta. However, in view of the existing emergency, ministerial agreements have been formalized, such as: No. MTD-2020-077,

where guidelines are issued for the application of the reduction, modification or suspension of the working day during the declaration of a health emergency, with the aim of guaranteeing the rights of workers and mitigating the occurrence of voluntary resignations.

Given this new scenario that affects the well-being of most families in Latin America and especially in Ecuador, this research determines which factors: personal, business, mobilization or others, influenced the termination of their work relationship or that their decision does not respond to a free and voluntary decision, even though there are several labor provisions issued by the National Government to mitigate unemployment during the COVID-19 health emergency.

From this context, it is important that the companies promote actions in prevention from the department of Human Talent to avoid voluntary resignations.

2. METHODOLOGY

a) Methodology design.

The present research work was developed in a mixed approach, called so because of the



existing relationship of qualitative and quantitative type because in addition to the collection of bibliographic information, techniques were used to collect the information that allowed to know better the reality in research.

Furthermore, the type of research carried out was descriptive-explanatory because we obtained an objective description of the current reality regarding voluntary resignations, as well as a detailed explanation of the factors that influenced the study's objectives, with the intention of promoting prevention protocols through the management of human talent that help the well-being of the worker. Similarly, the inductive method was used to find the possible general causes of the subject under investigation.

b) Research participants.

In order to know the size of the population under study, the calculation was made with a confidence level of 95%, assuming an expected proportion of 5% and an admissible error of 3%, and this was chosen through a simple random sampling due to the existing diversity, which was adequately obtained with a total of 203 people

surveyed, which allowed us to guarantee the validity and effectiveness of the statistical analyses estimated in the research and 3 experts in the area of Law, Human Talent and Social Work to carry out in-depth interviews.

Area of study.

The research was carried out in several sectors in the city of Quevedo, province of Los Ríos, where there are job-generating companies.

c) Techniques employed.

With the sole purpose of obtaining reliable results, we proceeded with the technique of surveys that were employed through the elaboration of virtual questionnaires and directed to the study population, in addition to interviews with: a Law professional, a Human Talent professional and a Social Worker.

Statistical analysis.

The data obtained in this research study were based on the complete data (203) extracted in Microsoft Excel, after the application of the survey instrument, which were then imported to the SPS v20.0 (IBM) in order to obtain descriptive frequencies



and statistics to establish the variables: dependent (labor stability and personal improvement), and independent (personal, business or transportation factor); measured in a nominal scale and represented in percentages.

3. RESULTS

Of the total number of people surveyed, Table 1 shows that the main reason is fear of COVID-19 infections in the company, represented by 44.8%, followed by 40% who say that the cause is mobilization to the workplace, 36% who say they have personal and family reasons and 27.1% who say they have a new job offer and others.

Table 1. Results of reasons for Voluntary Resignations.

| Reasons | Answers No. | Percentage off cases |
|--|-------------|----------------------|
| Family problems | 8 | 3,9% |
| New job offer | 22 | 10,8% |
| Fear of COVID-19 infections in the company | 91 | 44,8% |
| COVID-19 infected relatives | 19 | 9,4% |
| Mobilization to the workplace | 46 | 22,7% |
| Lack of mobilization | 37 | 18,2% |
| Lack of security at the workplace | 34 | 16,7% |
| Personal disease | 19 | 9,4% |

| | | |
|------------------|----|-------|
| Relative disease | 9 | 4,4% |
| Relative death | 18 | 8,9% |
| Others | 33 | 16,3% |

Source: Self elaboration with results of the field work. Quevedo, July 5th, 2020

In this context, it is also necessary to note that most of the participants indicated that they knew the symptoms that produce the virus of COVID-19 and that the company where they worked did provide them with training in prevention and gave them PPE to avoid infection of the virus. Thus, for example, what is established in Table 2, where we show that the use of masks represented in 74.4%, hand washing in 60.6% and the use of alcohol in 65% were the measures most applied by the subjects of the study, in relation to other measures exposed in the same table but that without any doubt express a lower applicability in relation to the 40.4% that indicated not having received trainings in prevention nor PPE.

Table 2. Prevention measures.

| Protective measures in the company | Answers No. | Percentage of cases |
|------------------------------------|-------------|---------------------|
| Use of mask | 151 | 74,4% |
| Use of gloves | 70 | 34,5% |
| Use of glasses | 45 | 22,2% |
| Use of overalls | 19 | 9,4% |
| Handwashing | 123 | 60,7% |



| | | |
|---------------------------------------|-----|-------|
| Use of alcohol and antibacterial gel. | 132 | 65,0% |
| COVID-19 tests | 36 | 17,7% |
| None | 23 | 11,3% |

Source: Self elaboration with results of the field work. Quevedo, July 5th, 2020

Similarly, it is important to discuss the fact that 60.1% said that in the companies where they worked, cases of COVID-19 infection were reported, despite the fact that they complied with occupational safety protocols.

On the other hand, Table 3 shows that of the total number of people surveyed, 122 indicated that the company did not provide them with transportation to and from work, while 81 indicated that it did. Therefore, those who indicated positive responses also mostly stated that this transportation did not have the measures to prevent COVID-19 infections.

Table 3. Transport to/from the workplace.

| Valid | Frequency | Percentage | Valid percentage | Accumulated percentage |
|--------------|-----------|------------|------------------|------------------------|
| Yes | 81 | 38,4 | 39,9 | 39,9 |
| No | 122 | 57,8 | 60,1 | 100,0 |
| Total | 203 | 96,2 | 100,0 | |

Source: Self elaboration with results of the field work. Quevedo, July 5th, 2020.

On the other hand, this study has also allowed us to show that at present 57.1% of

the total surveyed indicated that they do not have an extra income to cover their basic needs and 81.3% indicated that they have not been able to get a job after their voluntary resignation, which motivates 50.2% to contemplate returning to their old job.

Nevertheless, and despite the effects associated with the voluntary resignations, most of those surveyed, that is, 119 indicated that their children are studying, which represents 58.6% of the total, compared to 84 who indicated no and which corresponds to 41.4%, having said this, it is also important to emphasize that 25.6% have their own rented housing and 12.3% have their own mortgage. Finally, it should be noted that most of them stated that they had family members who were vulnerable to COVID-19 and, to a lesser extent, that they had suffered the death of a family member during the pandemic.

4. DISCUSSION

The results obtained in the present study determine five approaches where the most relevant reasons considered by people in work relationship to present their voluntary resignations to their employer are grouped



and that are related to the factors: family, mobilization, company, COVID-19 and personal desire. However, and in accordance with what was expressed in the interviews conducted with the participating professionals, as the main reason they framed the fear of COVID-19 contagion in the company, which undoubtedly not only expresses the free will or desire of the worker, but is also considered as a forced resignation, due to the existing fear for the lack of security in the companies during the unexpected health emergency. In this regard, we also believe it is important to note that the interviewees stated that despite the fear generated by the pandemic, the companies where they worked provided them with training in prevention and most of them provided them with PPE to avoid contagion among workers, thus perceiving a high level of organizational support and commitment, which could contradict what was expressed previously and in a certain way would express in some, the willingness to justify their voluntary resignation under the fear of contagion by COVID-19. However, and considering that the COVID-19 crisis also has economic repercussions, it is doubtful that employees will decide to give up their

work despite the protection and prevention processes in the company unless the presence of a generalized state of panic that makes the feeling of security impossible is considered.

On the other hand, focusing on variables regarding the well-being and labor stability of the people under study, it is worth mentioning that the results have obviously shown an effect on their quality of life after the resignations, as they only receive the settlement that by law corresponds to them when their labor relationship ends under the figure of voluntary resignation or eviction and do not have an extra income for the time they are unemployed, which would be related to the economic support that the unemployed receive from social security to cover their basic needs and those of their families, as well as not having been able to get a new job. This situation, besides evidencing the problems of the present study, also generates conditions of struggle and survival where coexistence and family needs motivate the search for work and even open the possibility of returning to their previous work and the management of possible panic.



Reaching this point where we make reference to labor stability when we have a secure job, which by right all human beings have and which is opposed to unemployment due to voluntary resignations, is that we focus the commitment that all companies have through their Human Talent department to promote compliance with protocols for the prevention of Occupational Hazards and diagnose social problems to improve the working conditions of their employees and avoid this type of resignation. However, some professionals agree that first the commitment must come from the State making the necessary labor reforms that allow labor stability in times of pandemic.

5. CONCLUSIONS

According to the current study, the health emergency of COVID-19 has motivated most of the voluntary resignations in companies.

This opens the debate that the occurrence of voluntary resignations does not always express the wish of the worker but is also incited by other external factors such as: family, business, transport or other factors that are presumed to put his or her life at risk in the context of the COVID-19.

Therefore, it is important that companies through its area of Human Talent continue to promote the provision of PPE and provide training to their employees to lower and appease the contagion and fear of contagion of COVID-19.

It can be pointed out that the Ecuadorian State, through the special agencies, must evaluate the impact that unemployment had during the health emergency of the COVID-19 in order to improve the working conditions that would allow for a decrease in the occurrence of voluntary resignations.

It is also relevant to promote from our professional actions the necessary information on prevention issues, as well as the resources available to help and mitigate the voluntary resignations during this episode of pandemic called COVID-19.

In this sense the role of the Social Worker and the Human Talent Team should be directed to the understanding, diagnosis, and management of the factors analyzed in this research and that motivated the voluntary resignations in the city of Quevedo.



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