

COVID - 19: Moving Work to Home Was Exciting, What About Now?***Covid - 19: İşyerinden Eve Taşınmak Heyecan Vericiydi, Peki Ya Şimdi?*****ID Hasan LATİF*****ID Engin KARAMAN†**Makale Geliş Tarihi / Received : 18.09.2021
Makale Kabul Tarihi / Accepted : 29.12.2021**Araştırma Makalesi**
Research Article**Öz**

Bu araştırmanın konusu COVID-19 sürecinde evden çalışma ve evden çalışanlardır. Araştırma genel olarak, evden çalışanların, kısa süre deneyimledikleri evden çalışmaya ilişkin izlenimleri ve evden çalışma ile işyerinde çalışma mukayesesine odaklanmıştır. Sonuç olarak, bekâr kadınların esnek çalışma sistemini tercih ettikleri, evden çalışmayı tercih edenlerin uzun vadede evden çalışmanın yaygınlaşacağına inanmadıkları ve evli erkeklerin de benzer tutum ve davranışlar sergiledikleri ortaya konmuştur. Ayrıca evli erkeklerin iş yerlerine dönme konusunda daha olumlu bir tutum sergiledikleri ortaya çıkmıştır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: COVID-19, Evden Çalışma, Esnek Çalışma, İnsan Kaynakları, Yeni Çalışma Biçimi, Ev/İşyeri Karşılaştırması

Abstract

The subject of this research is working from home during the COVID-19 process. The study focused on the comparison of working from home and working in the workplace in terms of employees who have experienced both methods. Consequently, it was shown that single women preferred flexible working system, the people who preferred to work from home did not believe that working from home would become widespread in the long run and married men exhibited similar attitudes and behaviors. Moreover, it was revealed that married men exhibited a more positive attitude towards returning to their workplaces.

Keywords: COVID-19, Working from Home, Flexible Working, Human Resources, A New Way of Working, Home/Workplace Comparison

Introduction

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic emerged in China in November 2019 and has been effective in all the countries of the world in a short time. In Turkey, the first COVID-19 case was reported on March 11, 2020 (Koca, F., Minister of Health of the Republic of Turkey, 2020). The first death due to COVID-19 occurred on March 17th ("Türkiye'de Koronavirüs'ten ilk" [In Turkey, the first coronavirus-related...], 2020). As other countries took various actions against the epidemic disease, Turkey put some restrictions into effect on particular segments of the population rather than a general restriction. A curfew was imposed on March 21 for the 65+ age group making up about 9% of the population, and then on April 3 for the -20 age group making up about 30% of the population ("İçişleri Bakanlığı: 65" [Ministry of Interior, Republic of Turkey: 65], 2020; "Sokağa Çıkma Yasası" [Curfew], 2020). Following the "stay at home"

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calls by the Ministry of Health (“Sağlık Bakanı Koca’dan” [Call from the Minister of Health], 2020), people started to withdraw to their homes.

COVID-19 is considered to be a natural biological disaster (Andersen et al., 2020). These types of disasters are unpredictable and inevitable (Ricciardi et al., 2011). COVID-19 is still new, and it continues. Although, for now, there are only biological effects that can manifest themselves in a very short time as well as social, psychological, and economic impacts, we hear the statements of the authorities who have a say in different fields that nothing will be the same anymore (“COVID-19 Pandemi Değerlendirme” [COVID-19 Pandemic Assessment], 2020).

In order to prevent the spread of COVID-19, the remote working process started in the public sector on 22 March by a Presidential circular (Resmi Gazete [The Official Gazette], 2020). We see that, in this process, a new working model has started in the private sector depending on the nature of the job, and some employees have started to work from home.

The spread of COVID-19 has increased the number of people working from home around the world. For example, in the UK, a 49.2% increase was detected in the number of people working from home due to Covid-19 in April 2020 (Office for National Statistics, n.d.). In Germany, working from home has increased by 12% compared to before Covid-19 (“German Labor Minister”, n.d.). In Turkey, the rate of working from home among head office employees reached 94.6% (“Covid-19 Nisan 2020 Anketi” [Covid-19 April 2020 Survey], 2020). At the point we have reached today, the view that working from home will become widespread and established is at the top of the scenarios of CEOs and human resources managers who say that nothing will be the same as before (“Yeni normal: Uzaktan,” 2020; Silvestri, 2020).

The subject of this research is working from home during the COVID-19 process and the people who work from home. In the study, the topic of working from home was examined in terms of the individuals who work from home. It can be said that the research is generally aimed at obtaining the impressions of the individuals who work from home regarding the situation of working from home they have experienced for a short time.

1. Theoretical Connections

Working from home, which has become a popular phenomenon with COVID-19 and subsequent obligatory stay-at-home process, is not actually a new work model; because modern home-based working (remote working or telecommuting) was designed in the years when the information and communication technology (ICT) revolution began in Western countries (McCarthy, 2020; “A brief history of the workhome”, n.d.). As Rosnay (1996) put it, place, time, and function forming the basis of the employment contract in the enterprise were destructed with the ICT revolution; electronic information highways and personal computers eliminated time and space; workplace, work, and the employee started to meet on fluid paths.

Utilizing the change theory, it is possible to explain the distinctive circumstances of working from home during the epidemic process. The doctrines of complexity and chaos (Rosnay, 2000, p. 29; Ruelle, 1991, p. 77; Crutchfield et al., 1986) indicate that COVID-19 is a situation beyond the chaos and an unpredictable and uncontrollable parameter in terms of businesses. After the exogenous chaos turns into endogenous chaos in the enterprises, managers take measures to protect employees from the epidemic disease, for example, sending some employees home for remote working; thus, they try to reduce endogenous chaos. According to chaos theory, a new order may emerge under the influence of different initial conditions. The initial conditions are the emergence and spread of the epidemic, and the measures taken by the managers to protect their employees. What would happen if there were no ICT; would it be possible to talk about working from home in that case? Certainly not! ICT can also be considered an initial condition that enables the emergence of the new order. The new order is to work from home and has been achieved mainly by ICT.

The new working order originates from compulsory social isolation. We observed that this process also served as an opportunity for home-based workers to escape from the monotony or boredom of the workplace (O'Hanlon, 1981; Smith, 1981; Geiwitz, 1966).

The start of working from home process meant a change in the existing order at home; after a while, it led to a comparison between home and workplace. It did not seem possible to meet the psychosocial needs at home, which were met through the informal relationships of the workplace (Maslow, 1943); in other words, we observed that individuals working from home experienced more motivation problems compared to the workplace. After these observations, we determined the following two research questions (RQ):

RQ 1: Do you experience more motivation problems when working at home than in the workplace?

RQ 2: You could meet your psychosocial needs (self-assertion, recognition, etc.) in the workplace; can you do that at home?

During home-workplace comparisons by home-based workers; after observing their concerns that their managers could overlook some behavioral expectations (Smith & Kendall, 1963) due to working from home and that could create a weakness in their performance appraisals, we developed the following research questions:

RQ 3: Are you worried that your achievements will not be evaluated, and you will not receive positive feedback - because you work from home and you are out of sight?

RQ 4: Do you worry that performance criteria other than the tangible data of daily routines, such as behavioral expectations, will be overlooked - because you work from home and you are out of sight?

Among the individuals who work from home, we saw those who stated that their managers expected them to work more and we developed the following research question:

RQ 5: Do you think that your manager expects you to work more, with the thought that "they work at home anyhow, no social life other than work, they should work a little more"?

Working from home has inevitable effects on family relationships. Theories about the dynamics of family life (White et al., 2015, p. 71, 141, 175) assume that the family has rules, that parents can have different personality characteristics, that parents will perceive each other with different personality traits, interpret and explain their behaviors. Social processes, conditions, and frustration, which are characterized by certain conflict possibilities, such as a decision within the family, an argument, different role behaviors of parents (Kish, Haslam & Newcombe, 2020), might lead to conflicts (Thomas, 1992; Argyle & Furnham, 1983; Gottman, 1979, p. 210; Pondy, 1967). With the emergence of COVID-19, forced isolation, and the start of working from home, we witnessed that gathering all family members at home increased conflicts above normal levels in some families and the following question came to mind:

RQ 6: Do you want to return to the workplace now, although you previously wanted to work at home?

After the beginning of the remote working caused by COVID-19 and getting so widespread for the first time, it is predicted that home-based working will continue even if everything returns to normal in the future. The study also intended to reveal the preferences in addition to the predictions of the people working from home. Thus, we aimed to determine 1- Whether the demographic variable groups exhibited a similar or different attitude, with the answers to the questions "Do you think the working-from-home model will increasingly become widespread?" and "If you were given a choice, would you prefer working from home, working in the workplace or a hybrid work model?", 2- Whether the demographic variable groups exhibited a similar or different attitude, with the answers given to Likert-type questions.

2. Research Method

In this study, home-based working, which emerged due to COVID-19, and home/workplace comparison were examined in terms of the people working from home. The research also focused on the predictions of the individuals working from home as to whether the new working model was temporary, and their preferences of home/workplace.

2.1. Research Participants

Participants of this research are employees from the service industry who switched to a home-based working scheme due to COVID-19. The average age of the participants is 36, 53% are women, and 46% are single. Participants were reached through friendship circles and close social relationships. The research was conducted between May 28 and June 12, 2020.

2.2. Scale Development Process

For the scale, the literature in the relevant field was reviewed. Since no scale could be found in accordance with the subject and the purpose, question statements were developed after face-to-face and telephone interviews with 21 employees who switched to the scheme of working from home due to COVID-19. Scale development experts were consulted in order to prevent ambiguity of the determined question statements, to improve their comprehensibility and to ensure their suitability to the subject and purpose. Based on the opinions of experts, a draft scale was developed, which included demographic, five-point Likert type, closed-ended, and multiple-choice question types. In the next step, the draft scale was applied to an experimental group consisting of 25 employees working from home, and the question statements were tested for comprehensibility and validity. Thus, through the scale that took its final form, the replies of the individuals working from home were obtained via Google Forms. A link to the survey was sent to 142 home-based employees with a Gmail account. There were 114 returns, erroneous and incomplete surveys were removed out of them. In the final analysis, 92 questionnaires formed the sample cluster. The responses were analyzed after being encoded in the SPSS software package.

"Do you think the working-from-home model will increasingly become widespread?" is a closed-ended question of the survey. 82% of the participants replied "yes" to this question. "If you were given a choice, which one would you choose as a place of work?" is the multiple-choice question of the survey. 15% of the participants were determined to prefer working from home, 10% working at the workplace, 75% working from home and workplace (hybrid work model).

2.3. Factor Analysis Results

Five-point Likert questions formed the basis of the scale. Factor analysis was applied to this part of the scale consisting of six items. The factor loadings and mean values of the items are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Factor analysis results of the comparison of working at Home/Workplace

Factor	Survey items	Loading	Mean
Comparison of working at Home/Workplace	I am worried that my achievements will not be evaluated, and I will not receive positive feedback - because I work from home and I am out of sight.	.905	2.89
	I worry that performance criteria other than the tangible data of daily routines, such as behavioral expectations, will be overlooked - because I work from home and I am out of sight.	.890	2.73
	I could meet my psychosocial needs (self-assertion, recognition, etc.) in the workplace; I cannot do that at home.	.877	2.30
	I experience more motivation problems when working at home than in the workplace.	.816	2.45
	I want to return to the workplace now, although I previously wanted to work at home.	.773	2.95
	I understand that my manager expects me to work more, with the thought that "they work at home anyhow, no social life other than work, they should work a little more".	.704	2.65

As a result of the analysis, KMO value (Kaiser, 1974) was 0.863, the result of Bartlett's Test was $p < 0.00$. These values indicated that the validity of the data for factor analysis was confirmed by the rejection of the null hypothesis that assumes no relationship between the variables. Cronbach's Alpha, α coefficient was used for the reliability of the scale. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was 0.964, indicating that the reliability of the scale was very good (Cortina, 1993).

As a result, all items were collected in one factor. This factor made up 69% of the total variance explained. It meant that there was identicalness in the answers given to all questions. When considering the mean values of the answers, it was observed that almost all of them were close to 3.00, and the state of indecision was dominant.

Another important issue for us was whether different demographic group properties exhibited the same attitude and behavior in the answers given to the questions. To find the answer to that question, homogeneity analysis, a type of optimal scaling, was employed.

2.4. Optimal Scaling

The Optimal Scaling technique was first introduced by Gifi (1991, p. 58), and afterward developed by Burg, Leeuw, and Verdegaal (1988). In particular, categorical variables at different scaling levels can be analyzed and signified in two-dimensional graphics. The purpose of optimal scaling is to maximize the correlation matrix properties of the quantified categorical variables (Linting et al., 2007). As with many other Gifi techniques, the Alternating Least Squares (ALS) algorithm is also used in this method. The algorithm performs the quantification processes through the implementation of various transformations to the categorical variables. Thereby, the relations in real space can be represented representatively in two or three-dimensional space only with a minimum loss (Leeuw & Mair, 2007).

The loss function is as shown below:

$$\sigma(x, a) = m^{-1} \sum_j SSQ(x - G_j a_j)$$

wherein, x : Object scores; a_j : Quantification of the categories of the variable; m : Vector that contains the number of categories of each variable; G_j : Indicator matrix for the variable j ; and $SSQ(\)$: Sum of squares of the matrix elements

A set of constraints is defined for the minimization of the loss function.

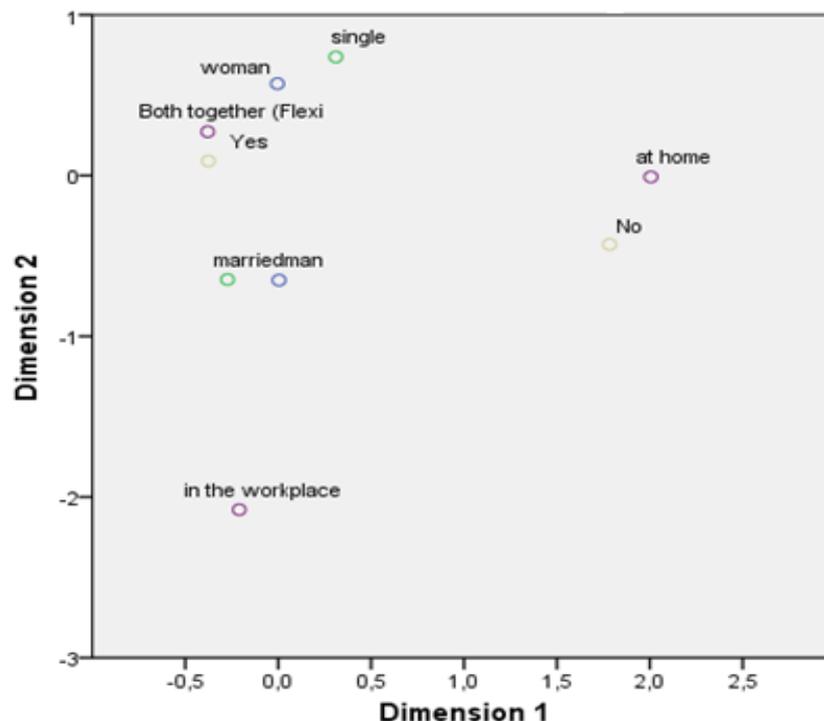
Constraints are $x'x = nI$ and $u'x = 0$

Through the constraints, object scores are transformed into standard normal variables with mean 0 and variance 1, hence these constraints are named as normalization constraints (Gifi, 1991, p. 88).

2.5. Homogeneity Analysis and the Results

Homogeneity analysis, which deals with variables that contain more than one category (Heiser & Meulman, 1994), assigns scores to the categories in a manner that maximizes the homogeneity of the variables and explains the relationships with the maximum possible variance on a graph. All the variables in the homogeneity analysis have multiple nominal scaling levels. Therefore, the multiple quantification method is used as the quantification process will be implemented for each dimension. Performing analyses among the four nominal scales in our scale, we observed what kind of similarities and differences the groups exhibited. These variables are 1- gender, 2- marital status, 3- predictions about the widespread adoption of working from home, and 4- workplace preference. After the quantification process, the data were displayed in two-dimensional Figure 1.

Figure 1: Homogeneity Analysis Chart for employees' genders, marital statuses, their predictions about the widespread adoption of working from home, and workplace preferences

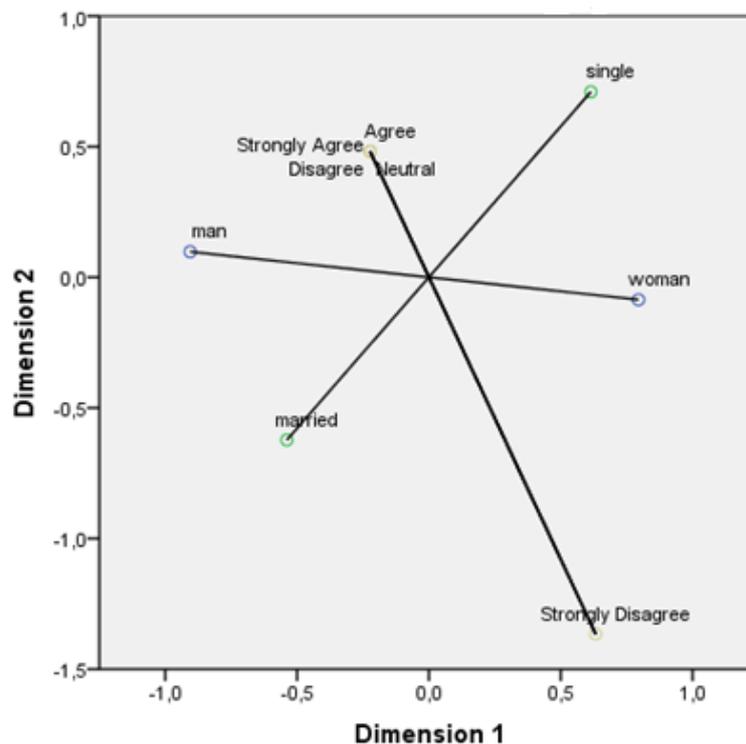


The chart conveys the following findings: 1- Single women who think that working from home will increasingly become widespread, prefer flexible working system; 2- The individuals who

prefer to work from home do not believe that working from home will become widespread in the long view; and 3- Married men exhibit similar attitudes and behaviors.

In this part of the analysis, it was investigated how similar or different the demographic variable groups were in terms of ordinal variables. However, it would be adequate to take one of the ordinal variables to avoid confusion in the graph. As stated above, since all scale items were identical and loaded on a single factor, consistent results would occur. For this, the variable "I want to return to the workplace now, although I previously wanted to work at home" was chosen. Since this part of the analysis involved ordinal-nominal variables, Nonlinear Principal Components Analysis was applied instead of Homogeneity Analysis. In this analysis, the loss function became stationary at the end of 41 iterations. After the quantification process, the data were displayed in two-dimensional Figure 2; the findings revealed that married men exhibited a more positive attitude towards returning to their workplaces.

Figure 2: Nonlinear Principal Components Analysis Chart for employees' genders, marital statuses, and their willingness about returning to the workplace or not



Conclusion

As a global health problem, COVID-19 introduced obligatory isolation and a new working model. Working from home is not a new phenomenon; it has existed before, but it has never become that widespread. The spread of COVID-19 in a short time has boosted the number of people working from home and made the home-based working more interesting. As COVID-19 pandemic and the home-based working, one of the protection measures taken against the disease continued, we heard the statements of the CEOs and Human Resources managers that nothing would be the same anymore, and their scenarios that remote working would become widespread and established. The scenarios that working from home would become more and more common were approved at the rate of 82% among all the findings of the study.

Remote working allowed the individuals working from home to compare two different workplaces. Home-based employees' indecisive attitude during the comparison of home and workplace can be attributed to their inexperience in remote working. We can say that their

attitudes about the subject could become more evident over time, as they experience the new working model.

The most important contribution of this research to the theory and practice is the "Working from Home vs. at the Workplace Comparison Scale". We hope that this scale will contribute to the existing knowledge in the fields of management, human resources management, employee and labor relations, and sociology of work. Practitioners will be able to benefit from this scale when determining the policies and strategies of the new order in the post-COVID-19 period when nothing will be the same as before. The scale is also capable of detecting the tendencies or preferences of the employees.

Overall, the study revealed interesting findings. For example, based on the impression we got from the preliminary research process, we had the foresight that working from home was still more attractive and preferable despite everything. However, when we look at the results, we see that the home-based working order, which was initiated to protect against the pandemic, does not create a very attractive situation from the perspective of employees. One of the interesting findings of the study is that married men exhibit a more positive attitude towards returning to their workplaces. This might result from the conflicts between family members and/or the possibility that the men may have suffered more boredom in this process. It is usual for the findings to create new hypotheses. It should be left to the researchers working in the relevant fields to test these hypotheses and to take this research further.

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