

Appropriately organized work and employees' concerns related to work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic: the case in Slovenia

Employees' concerns related to work from home

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Abstract

Purpose – The main aim of the paper is to establish the effects of appropriately organized work as well as the effects of the employees' concerns related to work during the COVID-19 pandemic on work efficiency and work satisfaction among employees working from home during this period. The empirical research includes 619 employees in Slovenia, who participated in the survey during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Design/methodology/approach – Structural equation modeling was used in exploring the effects between constructs.

Findings – Based on the results, the authors found that appropriately organized work during the COVID-19 pandemic has a positive effect not only on the work efficiency of employees who work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic in Slovenia but also on their work satisfaction. Also, based on the results, the authors found that the employees' concerns related to work during the COVID-19 pandemic have a negative effect on the work efficiency and on the work satisfaction of employees who work from home during this period in Slovenia.

Originality/value – The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically changed the way we live and work; therefore, this paper contributes to the creation of new working conditions and employee management during and also after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords COVID-19 pandemic, Appropriately organized work, Work efficiency, Work satisfaction, The employees' concerns related to work

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

The global outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is affecting every part of human lives, including the physical world (Rume and Islam, 2020). COVID-19 first appeared in Wuhan, China, in December 2019 with a notable outbreak. Further, it spread all over the world at a very high speed due to its high communicability (Saleh, 2020). On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced the characterization of COVID-19 as a pandemic (Hassany *et al.*, 2020). Since February 2020, affected countries have locked down their cities, industries and restricted the movement of their citizens to minimize the spread of the virus (Khan *et al.*, 2021). The measures were taken to control the spread of the virus, and the slowdown of economic activities had significant effects on the companies (Cao *et al.*, 2020). In April 2020, the Office for National Statistics (2020) reported that in the United Kingdom (UK), 46.6% of people in employment did some work from home, mainly due to the pandemic. Going forward, making the working environment more conducive to people's requirements will become a really



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important strategy for every organization (Office for National Statistics, 2020). Before the pandemic, research in the UK suggested that 64% of people thought that their working environment had a negative impact on their health. People will return to work, but how they perceive working will be changed (Open Access Government, 2020). Given the new way of working, the well-being of employees is probably more important today than it has ever been before. More importantly, companies need to look at how the environment can enhance the way people work and improve their productivity and satisfaction (Tull *et al.*, 2020). Most people have learned to cope with and adapt to working from home, but many would like the flexibility to decide when, how and more importantly, what environment they will be going into. Therefore, companies need to provide the same comfort factor in offices as employees were doing in their homes so that people want to come into the office environment (Saleh, 2020; Asmundson and Taylor, 2020). COVID-19 has had a drastic and sudden impact on the practices of both workplaces and within companies (Carroll and Conboy, 2020). COVID-19 forced, if not all, then most, employees globally to adjust their work patterns (Davison, 2020). From a business context, employers had to find new ways to ensure productivity from workers working remotely from their homes. As a result, the flexibility of working from home became a new way of operating for many workers (Matli, 2020). Thus, workplace management during and after the COVID-19 pandemic has become a global challenge (Hou *et al.*, 2021). The workplace redesign shall embrace a high level of flexibility to suit the changes in the business environment, human preference and environmental requirements on sustainability, safety and health (Madero Gómez *et al.*, 2020). According to Etheridge *et al.* (2020) and Khan *et al.* (2021), there has been a sharp decline in employees' job satisfaction since the onset of the pandemic. Work hours have increased substantially in the wake of the pandemic. Many employees reported that they are working more hours (either officially or unofficially) than they were before the pandemic (Etheridge *et al.*, 2020; Khan *et al.*, 2021). This is most often due to the extra work that online/remote work entails, an increased number of parent or student meetings/communications and an increased number of work meetings/communications (Toscano and Zappalà, 2020). Also, employees are increasingly worried about the loss of jobs and salary reduction during the COVID-19 pandemic. These factors, in turn, lead to less work satisfaction and work efficiency (Xiao *et al.*, 2020).

Current times, where there are more and more complications and problems related to work regulation due to epidemiological problems, require the adjustment of both employers and employees. In response to the uncertainties brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, many companies have partially or completely switched to working from home. While some employees have been working from home for at least part of the time, the new situation and the transition to work from home is a new challenge for the vast majority, as well as for their employers. There is not much literature and research that is comprehensively and systematically based on theoretical knowledge or studies about employees' concerns related to work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic, appropriately organized work and also research based on the case of the Slovenian companies. With this research, we wanted to fill that gap. The study contributes to the existing literature with new insights related to the design of an appropriate work environment for employees during the COVID-19 and even after the COVID-19 pandemic, which lead to an increase in work efficiency and work satisfaction. Also, the paper provides new perspectives on how the employees' concerns related to work during the COVID-19 pandemic reduce work efficiency and satisfaction. The main aim of this paper is to establish the effects of appropriately organized work as well as the effects of the employees' concerns related to work during the COVID-19 pandemic on work efficiency and work satisfaction among employees working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic.

After a qualitative study in which we used a descriptive approach to investigate the above-written constructs in the existing literature, we carried out an empirical study using a

questionnaire. Structural equation modeling was used to explore the effects among the constructs included in our empirical research. The rest of the paper thus provides an overview of the literature, and the description and results of the empirical research and a wide-ranging discussion of the results are obtained, supported by comparisons in the existing literature. The paper concludes with recommendations aimed at employers and managers for appropriately organized work and reducing employees' concerns related to work from home during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. Literature review

2.1 Importance of appropriately organized work during the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has a strong impact on the work of all employees, as working from home or other places virtually for a longer period is a new experience for many. It is important for companies to find out how to best organize work, teamwork and how to communicate (Feng and Savani, 2020; Matli, 2020). According to Feng and Savani (2020), employees who work from home are spending longer time at their desks and facing a bigger workload than before the COVID-19 pandemic (Feng and Savani, 2020). According to a survey of 2,800 workers by Los Angeles-based staffing firm Robert Half, nearly 70% of professionals who transitioned to remote work because of the pandemic say they now work on the weekends, and 45% say they regularly work more hours during the week than they did before (Maurer, 2020). This survey also found that working parents were more likely to work weekends and more than eight hours per day than those without children. Men were more likely than women to report working on weekends and putting in 40-plus hour workweeks. And more workers under the age of 40 said they usually work weekends and more than eight hours per day than those older than 40 (Maurer, 2020). The online survey of 4,011 employees and 1,007 employers in the USA, the UK, Singapore and the United Arab Emirates (Aetna International, 2020) also found that since the onset of the pandemic, 74% of all employees say poor mental health has impacted their productivity during the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, 84% of employees agree that their mental health is more important now than it was a year ago, and 40% of employers say they are concerned that a lack of social interaction among colleagues will have a long-term negative impact on some workers' mental health. Likewise, 61% of workers want to return to the office full time, while 81% say they would return if they still can work remotely for part of the week (Aetna International, 2020). Gašić and Berber (2021) investigate the impact of flexible work arrangements on employee engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Republic of Serbia. The research was conducted during 2020/21 on a sample of 219 employees on whom this pandemic had a great impact and brought changes in the way of working, which became quite different from before. Based on the conducted research, the authors concluded that flexible work arrangements have a positive impact on the work engagement of employees in the Republic of Serbia and a negative impact on turnover intentions during the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey conducted by the World Economic Forum (Ipsos, 2020) among nearly 13,000 employed men and women across 28 countries finds that 56% of them experienced increased anxiety around job security and 55% found changes in work routines and organization stressful. Almost half (49%) of all surveyed employees felt lonely or isolated when working from home and had difficulty in finding a work-life balance (50%), as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. More than 40% said their productivity fell, and it was hard to get work done at home (Ipsos, 2020). Kavčič *et al.* (2021) in their research on 2,722 Slovenian participants (75% female) found out that younger women and less-educated participants had higher odds for less favorable psychological functioning during the COVID-19 outbreak. In addition, poor health indicators and COVID-19 infection concerns predicted diminished psychological functioning. While previous research suggests that mental health problems increase during pandemics, Krasulja *et al.* (2015) addressed the issue of family-work balance, as well as the

connection between this phenomenon and working from home. The basic, initial point is that the desired balance can be achieved if the employees are provided with more flexible work schemes. There are more and more employees who do not want to feel the work pressure after work hours, especially those belonging to younger generations (Krasulja *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, there is a need for appropriately organized work during the COVID-19 pandemic, and companies should reconsider their leadership, management and communication policies, along with their approach to employee health, well-being, work efficiency and work satisfaction.

2.2 The employees' concerns related to work during the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic led to the closure of the country, parts of the global economy have come to a standstill, national borders have been closed, and quarantines, social distancing and curfews have been implemented (Jamali *et al.*, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has affected most companies' workplaces and productivity. Companies have had to make provision for staff to operate remotely following the implementation of lockdown regulations around the world because the pandemic has led to restrictions on movement and the temporary closure of workplace premises (Matli, 2020). The study on a random sample of 150 Egyptian respondents (Saleh, 2020) shows that more than 70% of respondents declared jobs being affected by the pandemic. Females showed a deteriorated state of mental health, together with the youth (≤ 44 years) and those who lost their jobs or suffered reduced income. In conclusion, mental health and stress showed to be affected among the Egyptian adults due to the "stay at home" orders. Prompt actions are highly recommended to save vulnerable populations at the time being and from the aggravation of their mental problems in the long term (Saleh, 2020). Those who lost their jobs temporarily or permanently experienced the worst state of mental health followed by those who suffered from reduced income (Saleh, 2020). As reported by Hamouche (2020), financial loss and job insecurity represented one aspect of the main stressors that affected human mental health in the pandemic since both individual employment and business sustainability were threatened. Also, the survey conducted by Zenefits (Workest by Zenefits, 2020) of 1,101 full-time employees based in the USA at companies with at least 20 employees reported that 43% of employees surveyed were concerned the reaction to the coronavirus would have a long-term negative impact on the company they worked for, and 42% agreed they were more worried about their job security since the spread of the virus. More than 50% of the employees surveyed expressed at least some concern about commuting to and working within their workplace because of the coronavirus. Of respondents, 54% agreed that they were "more concerned" about traveling to or working in a company office or facility because of the coronavirus, and 55% of employees also felt the impact on productivity would be minimal if their company asked personnel to work from home (Workest by Zenefits, 2020). Mousa and Samara (2022) found out that employees (business academics) usually consider meaningful work as playing a major role in shaping their mental health, especially after a crisis. This indicates that the more they perceive their jobs as valuable and worthwhile, the more they can deal with limitations and mental health issues (e.g. anxiety, stress, inadequate sleep, etc.) that accompany a crisis. The findings also show that during the time of the COVID-19 crisis, employees (business academics) have not placed so much importance to their autonomy (ability to choose and/or participate in decision-making processes) in the workplace. Instead, they care more about their relatedness (sense of belongingness) and their level of competence (sense of capability).

2.3 Work efficiency and work satisfaction among employees during the COVID-19 pandemic

Tull *et al.* (2020), in their research article, highlighted that the "stay-at-home" orders could be associated with a negative impact on psychological health, including depression, anxiety and

stress that could be aggravated by the pandemic condition itself (Asmundson and Taylor, 2020). Some of the mentioned mental health triggers included psychosocial factors, like disturbed daily life routine and social activities, affected economy and restricted ability to work (Cao *et al.*, 2020). These factors lead to a low level of work efficiency and work satisfaction among employees during the COVID-19 pandemic (Toscano and Zappalà, 2020). The survey by Morikawa (2020) shows that the productivity of employees adopting the home working arrangement during the COVID-19 pandemic is, on average, 30–40% lower than that in the office. Bartik *et al.* (2020), using data from a survey of small and medium-sized firms in the USA, report a decrease in the productivity of about 20% on average (Bartik *et al.*, 2020). On the other hand, employees at home report being approximately as productive as before the pandemic, on average. However, productivity varies substantially across socioeconomic groups, industries and occupations. Employees in sectors that are less suitable for home working, according to external metrics, report productivity declines. Groups reporting worse productivity are low earners, the self-employed and women, particularly those with children (Etheridge *et al.*, 2020). Also, declines in productivity are strongly associated with declines in mental well-being and work satisfaction (Toscano and Zappalà, 2020). The COVID-19 emergency created concern in many people who were reporting anxiety, depression and stress, especially when they were already suffering from poor health (Wang *et al.*, 2020). Rožman *et al.* (2021) found out that there are significant gender differences in work satisfaction and work efficiency among employees who work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research on 785 employees in Slovenian companies showed that the work satisfaction among female employees during the COVID-19 pandemic is perceived lower than work satisfaction among male employees because their higher household demands, care for children and care for elderly relatives interfere with work. Additionally, the results also indicate that the perceived reduction in work efficiency among female employees during the COVID-19 pandemic is highly expressed than among male employees. Studies on work at the time of COVID-19 also show that confinement has led to an increase in inequalities between groups of employees, with some employees being more satisfied and others being more dissatisfied with their work (Raišiene *et al.*, 2020). On the other hand, remote working has also allowed employees to discover they could work from home, which, in turn, also leads to an increase or decrease in work efficiency among employees (Toscano and Zappalà, 2020). Also, Nurhani and Santeso (2020) emphasize that stress leads to decreased work efficiency and also work satisfaction.

3. Conceptual model and hypotheses tested

The lack of face-to-face interaction with colleagues presents one of the main differences between working in ordinary times and remote working in the time of COVID-19. The massive application of telework has caused a lot of problems for some employees (Bouziri *et al.*, 2020), therefore making the phenomenon not limited to a few people but applicable to thousands of employees who had to use technologies to communicate and reduce the sense of social isolation and loneliness during the COVID-19 pandemic (Hwang *et al.*, 2020). Overload or complexity of technologies needed to work remotely have adverse outcomes on employees' efficiency and satisfaction (Molino *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, there is a relationship between loneliness and higher levels of stress during the COVID-19 pandemic, which also leads to less efficiency and less satisfaction among employees (Xiao *et al.*, 2020). Also, according to Bouziri *et al.* (2020) and Rume and Islam (2020), teleworking has different effects on the physical and mental health of employees. Teleworking turned out to be much more strenuous at the start of the pandemic than anyone would have imagined, especially from a psychological standpoint (Bouziri *et al.*, 2020; Rume and Islam, 2020). Employees were suddenly torn away from their teams and often the work day dragged on throughout the day, and many employees felt they

were working even more hours than usual (Rožman *et al.*, 2021). Advocacy for the physical and mental health of employees has therefore become even more important during the pandemic (Asmundson and Taylor, 2020). Satisfied employees work with better quality and are more efficient, thus contributing to the success of the organization. In fact, if employees are not healthy (physically or mentally) and do not feel well, they cannot contribute to business success. From this point of view, the appropriate work environment affects employee satisfaction and efficiency, especially during COVID-19 pandemic. According to this, the following two hypotheses are proposed:

- H1.* Appropriately organized work during the COVID-19 pandemic has a positive effect on the work efficiency of employees who work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- H2.* Appropriately organized work during the COVID-19 pandemic has a positive effect on the work satisfaction of employees who work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Toscano and Zappalà (2020) in their survey on 265 Italian employees found out that the positive relationship between perceived remote work productivity and remote work satisfaction was enhanced in the least worried employees and lessened in the most concerned ones. In other words, remote work satisfaction was higher for employees with higher perceived productivity and lower concern about the virus, while it was lower for employees with lower perceived productivity and higher concern about the virus. In short, the most worried employees showed a more modest increase in the relationship between remote work productivity and remote work satisfaction. Also, according to Ellingrud *et al.* (2020), employees are especially worried about workplace health and safety. They worry about losing their jobs. Most employees have more responsibility than ever before, both through increased workloads and additional home responsibilities; therefore, they are concerned with the work–life balance. This leads to a low level of work efficiency and work satisfaction among employees during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, Tull *et al.* (2020) emphasize that the pandemic has brought many changes, especially at work. These changes have caused a lot of uncertainty among employees, which, in turn, leads to increased concerns about their work and future. Also, many people after a pandemic will be afraid of the risks associated with leaving home and moving around large groups of people. It is important that the company provides appropriate protocols to make employees feel safe at work (Tull *et al.*, 2020; Workest by Zenefits, 2020). Creating appropriate working conditions and the company's concern to reduce employees' worries about their work lead to easier reconciliation of employees' work and private lives (Asmundson and Taylor, 2020). Employees do their work without additional worries and stress, which has a positive effect on increasing their satisfaction, motivation and efficiency. Also, appropriate work arrangements help employees maintain mental and physical health, get sick less often and reduce the chances of developing emotional exhaustion and burnout among employees (Bartik *et al.*, 2020; Hamouche, 2020). Therefore, the following two hypotheses are proposed:

- H3.* The employees' concerns related to work during the COVID-19 pandemic have a negative effect on the work efficiency of employees who work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- H4.* The employees' concerns related to work during the COVID-19 pandemic have a negative effect on the work satisfaction of employees who work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to the above hypotheses, the conceptual model presented in Figure 1 was proposed.

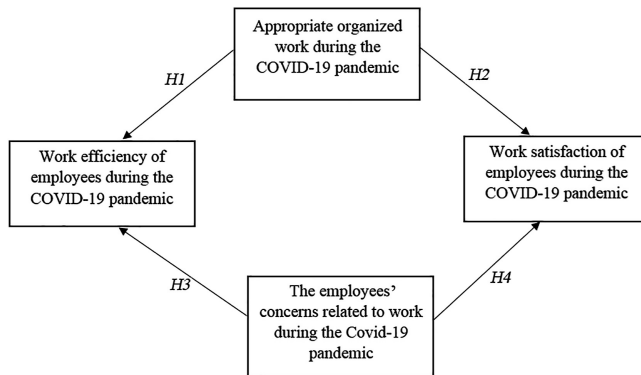


Figure 1. Conceptual model and hypotheses

4. Methodology

4.1 Data and sample

Our empirical research includes 619 employees who participated in the survey during the COVID-19 pandemic (80 companies participated in the survey). Regarding the age structure, the survey includes 8.6% of employees aged from 26 to 31 years, 14.9% employees aged from 32 to 37 years, 18.6% employees aged from 38 to 43 years, 19.7% employees aged from 44 to 49, 20.8% employees aged from 50 to 55 years, 13.7% employees aged from 56 to 61 years and 3.7% employees aged over 62 years. Regarding gender, 53.6% women and 46.4% men were involved. The companies in which employees were employed are manufacturing (16.8%); trade, maintenance and repair of motor vehicles (15.3%); financial and insurance activities (11.8%); information and communication activities (11.1%); real estate business (10.5%), professional, scientific and technical activities (10.3%); health and social care (10.1%); other diversified business activities (6.5%); catering (4.4%); transport and storage (2.3%); and other activities (0.9%).

4.2 Research instrument

For the research instrument, we used a closed-type questionnaire (see the first column in Table 1). Items for work satisfaction were adopted from Hayday (2003). Items for work efficiency were adopted from the study of Mustajab *et al.* (2020). Items for the employees' concerns related to work during the COVID-19 action were adopted from the study of Workest by Zenefits (2020). Items for the appropriately organized work during the COVID-19 pandemic were adopted from the study of Hwang *et al.* (2020). The respondents indicated their agreement to the listed statements at a five-point Likert-type scale from 1 – completely disagree to 5 – completely agree.

4.2.1 Independent variables. In our research, we used two independent variables: (1) appropriately organized work during the COVID-19 pandemic, which was measured with nine items, and (2) the employees' concerns related to work during the COVID-19 pandemic, which were measured with eight items (see Table 1).

4.2.2 Dependent variables. In our research, we used two dependent variables: (1) work efficiency of employees during the COVID-19 pandemic, which was measured with six items, and (2) work satisfaction of employees during the COVID-19 pandemic, which was measured with eight items (see Table 1).

4.2.3 Control variables. In our research, we used age of employees, gender and type of business activity as control variables (see section 4.1).

4.3 Statistical analysis

We established the justification to use the factor analysis based on the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy ($KMO \geq 0.5$) (Kaiser, 1974) and Bartlett's test of sphericity.

Statement	Factor label	Cronbach's alpha	Communalities	Factor loadings
Employees are provided with detailed information on ways to prevent infection with SARS-CoV-2	Appropriately organized work during the COVID-19 pandemic	0.911	0.843	0.918
The employer spends more time communicating with employees than in normal working conditions			0.822	0.906
The employer organizes an online meeting at least once a week where we discuss work or obligations during the COVID-19 pandemic			0.820	0.905
The employer allows me to distribute my work obligations than in normal working conditions			0.785	0.886
The employer allows me more flexible working hours than in normal working conditions			0.737	0.858
The employer allows me more flexible workspace (working from home) than in normal working conditions			0.828	0.916
The employer allows me more part-time work than in normal working conditions			0.789	0.888
If necessary, the reorganization of the workplace is enabled			0.767	0.876
If necessary, the employer organizes online educational programs			0.803	0.896
KMO = 0.951; Bartlett's test of sphericity: approx. chi-square = 6075.512; df = 36; $p < 0.001$; cumulative percentage of explained variance: 79.536%				
During the COVID-19 pandemic, I am not exposed to stress when doing my work	Work efficiency of employees during the COVID-19 pandemic	0.875	0.665	0.816
During the COVID-19 pandemic, I do not feel a lack of my work capacity			0.678	0.840
During the COVID-19 pandemic, I do not feel a decrease in concentration when doing my work			0.728	0.853
I do not do less work than in normal working conditions			0.790	0.889
My willingness to work has not diminished			0.816	0.903
My quality of work has not decreased			0.818	0.904
KMO = 0.866; Bartlett's test of sphericity: approx. chi-square = 3494.102; df = 15; $p < 0.001$; cumulative percentage of explained variance: 74.282%				

Table 1.
Factor analysis results

(continued)

Statement	Factor label	Cronbach's alpha	Communalities	Factor loadings		
I concern about job insecurity	The employees' concerns related to work during the COVID-19 pandemic	0.893	0.776	0.884		
I concern about financial loss			0.771	0.881		
I am concerned about the lack of information about the company during the COVID-19 pandemic			0.678	0.823		
I am concerned about the changed working conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic			0.764	0.878		
I am concerned that I will not finish the work in a certain amount of time			0.755	0.869		
Due to different working conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic, I concern about the work-life balance			0.760	0.874		
Due to different working conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic, I concern about too long workplace distancing (isolation)			0.736	0.847		
Due to different working conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic, I concern about alienation from co-workers			0.628	0.792		
KMO = 0.913; Bartlett's test of sphericity: approx. chi-square = 3488.474; df = 28; $p < 0.001$; cumulative percentage of explained variance: 66.164%						
I am satisfied with the balance between my work and private life during the COVID-19 pandemic			Work satisfaction of employees during the COVID-19 pandemic	0.924	0.680	0.825
I am satisfied with enabling the flexible workspace (working from home) during the COVID-19 pandemic	0.814	0.902				
I am satisfied with flexible working hours during the COVID-19 pandemic	0.753	0.868				
I am satisfied with the distribution of work obligations during the COVID-19 pandemic	0.743	0.862				
I am satisfied with the level of self-regulation of work speed that is enabled during the COVID-19 pandemic	0.792	0.890				
I am satisfied to solve work problems together during the COVID-19 pandemic	0.797	0.893				
I am satisfied with the given clear instructions and objectives from the employer during the COVID-19 pandemic	0.715	0.846				
I am satisfied with the leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic	0.743	0.862				
KMO = 0.952; Bartlett's test of sphericity: approx. chi-square = 6561.877; df = 28; $p < 0.001$; cumulative percentage of explained variance: 76.806%						

Employees' concerns related to work from home

Table 1.

Also, fulfillment of criteria regarding factor loadings ($\eta \geq 0.5$), communalities of variables ($h > 0.4$) and eigenvalues of factors ($\lambda \geq 1.0$) were analyzed (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2013). The quality of the measurement model was measured by the variance explained for a particular construct. We checked the reliability of measurements within the scope of inner consistency with Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Chronbach, 1951). As part of the convergent validity, the authors examined average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR) coefficients, keeping in mind the criteria $AVE > 0.5$ and $CR > 0.7$ and the criterion $CR > AVE$ (Kock, 2019). To check for multicollinearity, we used variance inflation factors (VIFs), considering the criterion $VIF < 5.0$ (Hair et al., 2010). The quality of the structural model was measured by the R -squared and adjusted R -squared coefficients, reflecting the percentage of explained variance of latent variables in the structural model, and the Stone-Geisser Q -squared coefficient. Thus, we examined the predictability value of the structural model. Acceptable predictive validity in connection with an endogenous latent variable is suggested by $Q^2 > 0$ (Kock, 2019). To test the model, the following rules were also applied: average path coefficient (APC, $p < 0.05$), average R -squared (ARS, $p < 0.05$), average adjusted R -squared (AARS, $p < 0.05$), average block variance inflation factor (AVIF < 5.0), average full collinearity VIF (AFVIF < 5.0), goodness-of-fit (GoF ≥ 0.36), Simpson's paradox ratio (SPR ≥ 0.7), the R -squared contribution ratio (RSCR ≥ 0.9), statistical suppression ratio (SSR ≥ 0.7) and nonlinear causality direction ratio (NLBCD ≥ 0.7) (Kock, 2019; Tabachnick and Fidell, 2013). To test the hypotheses, the authors used the path coefficient associated with a causal link in the model (γ) and indicator of Cohen's effect (f^2), with 0.02, 0.15 and 0.35 indicating the small, medium and large effect sizes (Kock, 2019; Tabachnick and Fidell, 2013). The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and WarpPLS software were used for data analysis.

5. Results

The results in Table 1 show that the values of the measure of sampling adequacy and the results of Bartlett's test of sphericity for each construct (appropriately organized work during the COVID-19 pandemic, work efficiency of employees during the COVID-19 pandemic, the employees' concerns related to work during the COVID-19 pandemic and work satisfaction of employees during the COVID-19 pandemic) suggest that the use of factor analysis is justified. The values of all communalities for all four constructs are higher than 0.40; therefore, we have not eliminated any variable. Also, all factor loadings are higher than 0.50 and significant at the 0.001 level. For each construct, the one-dimensional factor solution was obtained. All measurement scales proved high reliability (all Cronbach's alpha > 0.80). In addition to the results in Table 1, the total variance explained for appropriately organized work during the COVID-19 pandemic is 79.5%, for work efficiency of employees is 74.3%, for the employees' concerns related to work during the COVID-19 pandemic is 66.2% and for work satisfaction of employees is 76.8%.

Key quality assessment indicators of the research model are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 shows that the indicators APC, ARS and AARS are statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), and the indicators AVIF and AFVIF are lower than 5.0 and are suitable. Indicator GoF shows the power of the underlying conceptual model (Kock, 2019), and the result of indicator GoF shows that the model is highly appropriate. The values of indicators SPR, RSCR, SSR and NLBCD are higher than the minimum prescribed values and are suitable. Table 3 presents indicators of the quality of the structural model.

Table 3 indicates that the values of the latent variables' R^2 , adjusted R^2 and Q^2 coefficients are greater than zero. CRs for all four constructs are greater than 0.7. Also, values of AVE for all four constructs are greater than 0.5. As all CR values were higher than AVE values, the authors confirmed the convergent validity for all the constructs studied. The VIF values ranged between 1.781 and 2.423 ($VIF < 5.0$), providing confidence that the structural model

Quality indicators	The criterion of quality indicators	Calculated values of indicators of model
Average path coefficient (APC)	$p < 0.05$	0.623, $p < 0.001$
Average <i>R</i> -squared (ARS)	$p < 0.05$	0.812, $p < 0.001$
Average adjusted <i>R</i> -squared (AARS)	$p < 0.05$	0.813, $p < 0.001$
Average block variance inflation factor (AVIF)	AVIF < 5.0	1.872
Average full collinearity VIF (AFVIF)	AFVIF < 5.0	2.835
Goodness-of-fit (GoF)	GoF ≥ 0.1 (low) GoF ≥ 0.25 (medium) GoF ≥ 0.36 (high)	0.724
Simpson's paradox ratio (SPR)	SPR ≥ 0.7	1.000
<i>R</i> -squared contribution ratio (RSCR)	RSCR ≥ 0.9	1.000
Statistical suppression ratio (SSR)	SSR ≥ 0.7	1.000
Nonlinear causality direction ratio (NLBCD)	NLBCD ≥ 0.7	1.000

Table 2. Model fit and quality indicators

Constructs	CR	AVE	R^2	Adj. R^2	Q^2	VIF
Appropriately organized work during the COVID-19 pandemic	0.984	0.712	(-)	(-)	(-)	2.169
The employees' concerns related to work during the COVID-19 pandemic	0.942	0.748	(-)	(-)	(-)	1.781
Work efficiency of employees during the COVID-19 pandemic	0.963	0.724	0.483	0.458	0.492	2.423
Work satisfaction of employees during the COVID-19 pandemic	0.986	0.813	0.467	0.453	0.471	2.294

Table 3. Indicators of quality of the structural model

Note(s): (-) values cannot be calculated because the construct is a baseline

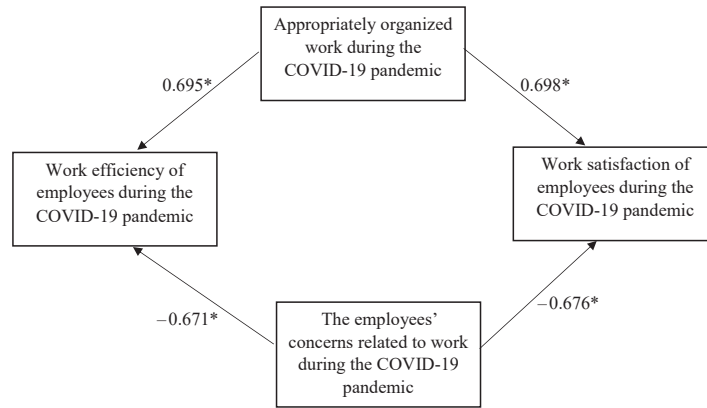
results were not affected by collinearity. The results of SEM and structural coefficients of links of the basic structural model are presented in Table 4. Figure 2 presents the conceptual model with the values of path coefficients.

The results in Table 4 and Figure 2 show that appropriately organized work during the COVID-19 pandemic for employees in Slovenia who work from home during this time has a positive effect on their work efficiency (AOW → WE = 0.695, $p < 0.001$). The value of Cohen's coefficient ($f^2 = 0.581$) is greater than 0.35 and shows that the effect of predictive latent variables is of high strength. In addition, appropriately organized work during the COVID-19

Hypothesized path	Link direction	Shape of link	Path coefficient (γ)	Effect size (f^2)	Standard error
AOW → WE	Positive	Nonlinear	0.695*	0.581	0.026
AOW → WS	Positive	Nonlinear	0.698*	0.583	0.028
EC → WE	Negative	Nonlinear	-0.671*	0.565	0.030
EC → WS	Negative	Nonlinear	-0.676*	0.569	0.028

Note(s): * $p < 0.001$; AOW – appropriately organized work during the COVID-19 pandemic; EC – the employees' concerns related to work during the COVID-19 pandemic; WE – work efficiency of employees during the COVID-19 pandemic; WS – work satisfaction of employees

Table 4. Standardized path coefficients for the proposed model



Note(s): * $p < 0.001$

Figure 2.
The conceptual model
with the values of path
coefficients

pandemic for employees in Slovenia who work from home during this time has a positive effect on their work satisfaction (AOW→WS = 0.698, $p < 0.001$). The value of Cohen's coefficient ($f^2 = 0.583$) shows that the effect of predictive latent variables is of high strength as well. The results in Table 4 and Figure 2 also show that the employees' concerns related to work during the COVID-19 pandemic have a negative effect on the work efficiency of employees who work from home in Slovenia (EC→WE = -0.671 , $p < 0.001$). The value of Cohen's coefficient ($f^2 = 0.565$) shows that the effect of predictive latent variables is of high strength too. Moreover, the employees' concerns related to work during the COVID-19 pandemic have a negative effect on the work satisfaction of employees who work from home in Slovenia (EC→WS = -0.676 , $p < 0.001$). Again, the value of Cohen's coefficient ($f^2 = 0.569$) shows that the effect of predictive latent variables is of high strength. The results in Table 4 show that there is a nonlinear connection between the individual constructs. Based on the above-written results, we confirmed hypothesis H1 (H1: appropriately organized work during the COVID-19 pandemic has a positive effect on the work efficiency of employees who work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic), H2 (H2: appropriately organized work during the COVID-19 pandemic has a positive effect on the work satisfaction of employees who work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic), H3 (H3: the employees' concerns related to work during the COVID-19 pandemic have a negative effect on the work efficiency of employees who work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic) and H4 (H4: the employees' concerns related to work during the COVID-19 pandemic have a negative effect on the work satisfaction of employees who work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic).

6. Discussion

The COVID-19-induced stressors, i.e. role overload, lifestyle choices and occupational discomfort, were significant predictors of distress during the lockdown. Family distraction, occupational discomfort and distress were significant in impacting work efficiency and work satisfaction (Kumar *et al.*, 2021). Based on the results of the empirical survey presented, we found that appropriately organized work during the COVID-19 pandemic has a positive effect on the work efficiency as well as on the work satisfaction of employees who work from home during this time in Slovenia. When discussing the results of our empirical research and developing recommendations, we must also be aware of the results of other research. For example, Morikawa (2020) found out that the work efficiency of employees adopting the home

working arrangement during the COVID-19 pandemic is, on average, 30–40% lower than that in the office. [Bartik et al. \(2020\)](#), using data from a survey of small and medium-sized firms in the USA, report a decrease in work efficiency of about 20% on average. [Battiston et al. \(2017\)](#) find that work efficiency is higher when employees are in the workplace and that the effect is stronger for urgent and complex tasks. They suggest that teleworking is unsuitable for tasks requiring face-to-face communication. [Dutcher \(2012\)](#) indicates that telecommuting may have a positive impact on employee efficiency for creative tasks but a negative impact for dull tasks. [Kumar et al. \(2021\)](#) emphasize that employees working from home face challenges in the form of family distractions. During this ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the help and support system in the form of day-care facilities, schools, colleges, domestic servants and others are no longer available to the majority of the households. Thus, almost everyone has been sharing the household responsibilities, family obligations along with work commitments. This leads to a reduction in work satisfaction among employees who work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to [Morikawa \(2020\)](#), the lack of face-to-face interactions, poor telecommunication environment at home and the existence of tasks that must be conducted in the office due to rules and regulations and other reasons were the major impediments to improving work efficiency and work satisfaction at home ([Morikawa, 2020](#)). Therefore, to achieve further improvements in working from home efficiency, innovation in telecommunication infrastructure and software that enables human interactions in a way that is similar to face-to-face communication is necessary. Our recommendation for improved work efficiency and work satisfaction is that companies strive to improve communication between employees. Also, everyone deals differently with the COVID-19 developments and with their own stress and concerns. These are coping mechanisms. Employers should give each employee his/her own rhythm to adapt. Employers should provide some structure by having regular meetings and one-on-ones where needed. Companies that lack open communication between employers and employees can run into problems. Employers who are accessible to their employees and effectively communicate expectations and responsibilities can more easily create a shared business. This approach helps with increasing employee efficiency, as employees feel directly connected to the organization's mission and goals. Employers should communicate about work planning, deadlines and expectations for each employee. Any change in work, projects and responsibilities needs to be clearly communicated to prevent wrong expectations and miscommunications. Ultimately, better communication can foster efficiency and increase work satisfaction. This is particularly important at the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, [Shareena and Shahid \(2020\)](#) found out that working from home was stressful for some employees as the home environment was found to be uncomfortable, disruptive and unsuitable for sustained periods of productive work. Therefore, we recommend that the employer allows employees who work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic have more flexible working hours, part-time work and distribute work obligations than in normal working conditions. Employers need to monitor the number of hours that their employees are logging and make it a priority to encourage time off and assist in balancing employee workloads. Parents of school-aged children are facing additional responsibilities to home-school their kids. Children need to stay active and entertained and require regular attention, which might lead to interruptions in online meetings and affect their parents' ability to focus or impact their work schedules. Employers should be aware of this and support those parents. Thus, work efficiency and work satisfaction can be improved because employees can better manage time constraints, workflow requirements and balancing work and family.

On the basis of the results of the empirical survey presented, we found that the employees' concerns related to work during the COVID-19 pandemic have a negative effect on the work efficiency as well as on the work satisfaction of employees who work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic in Slovenia. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way people work.

Kumar *et al.* (2021) emphasize that most of the companies have been forced to shift from a physical office to working from home set up. This shift coupled with the ongoing pandemic can affect the individual employees' work efficiency and employees' work satisfaction, which, in turn, can induce psychological distress (Kumar *et al.*, 2021). For example, a survey conducted by Caputo and Hyland (2020) on a sample of 256 employees working in the small, medium and large companies shows that 72% of respondents said that companies should provide more reassurance that employees will not lose their jobs and will receive paid leave during the virus. The concern related to job insecurity diminishes their work satisfaction and also work efficiency. Next, respondents said communication is critical: 68% said companies should keep people informed with daily updates throughout the crisis. Additionally, respondents said their companies should be sure to provide emotional support (65%) and online mental health resources (55%) during the pandemic because concerns related to their job reduce their work satisfaction and work efficiency (Caputo and Hyland, 2020). Therefore, we recommend that employers should focus on the physical and mental health and well-being of their employees. Allowing for remote work where possible, providing safety training and information, and setting clear guidelines around what employees should do if they get sick are all critical first steps. As a second step, ensure their employees are getting the mental health support they need to cope with the stresses (e.g. work–life balance, social isolation and anxiety) of the pandemic. Employers should listen to their employees and ask them about their concerns. During a crisis, information is critical. By providing employees with a regular update on everything from the basics (e.g. safety procedures) to the big picture (e.g. how is our business faring), the employer can help his/her employees feel informed, empowered and grounded.

Work satisfaction and work efficiency among employees who work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic are extremely important factors of today's companies. Also, appropriately organized work and reduction of employees' concerns related to work among employees who work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic enable the improvement of the working atmosphere and are associated with a positive impact on employees and the effects of their work tasks. According to Bulińska-Stangrecka and Bagieńska (2021), especially in times of sudden changes and reorganization caused by important events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the issue of positive mental health, satisfaction and efficiency at work is gaining importance. The emergence of the disease caused by the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 caused a number of changes in the functioning of society and companies. In order to prevent the spread of the virus, a state of epidemic emergency was introduced in several countries, which led to changes in the work environment.

6.1 Limitations and future research

Our study is limited to the Slovenian companies. Moreover, the limitations of our research refer to the four constructs, which are appropriately organized work, the employees' concerns related to work, work efficiency of employees and work satisfaction of employees, all of them during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, for future research, we recommend an upgrade of the measurement instrument with new constructs and also the future research can compare these results with some other countries. Also, for future research, we recommend analyzing differences in work satisfaction and work efficiency among employees before the COVID-19 pandemic and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

7. Conclusion and implications

7.1 Summary of findings

Specifically, this study highlights the role of work efficiency and work satisfaction in remote working conditions caused by the pandemic. In this paper, we found that appropriately

organized work during the COVID-19 pandemic has a positive effect on the work efficiency and work satisfaction of employees who work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic in Slovenia and also that the employees' concerns related to work during the COVID-19 pandemic have a negative effect on the work efficiency and work satisfaction of employees who work from home during this time in Slovenia. As a result of the changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, employee anxiety, stress (Sahni, 2020), changes in risk perception, experiencing anxiety of isolation, stigma and discrimination (Baldassarre *et al.*, 2020) have increased significantly. Stress was caused by new factors such as health and life threats, numerous restrictions and recommendations due to the epidemic state (stay-at-home, closure of many institutions), isolation and lack of social support, disturbed work-home balance and lack of sufficient physical activity lowering overall stress resistance (Irigoyen-Camacho *et al.*, 2020).

7.2 Theoretical implication

Main contribution to the science is reflected in the first made research about determined constructs (appropriately organized work during the COVID-19 pandemic, work efficiency of employees during the COVID-19 pandemic, the employees' concerns related to work during the COVID-19 pandemic and work satisfaction of employees during the COVID-19 pandemic) related to employees who were working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic in Slovenia, which can be a starting point for similar research studies in other countries and theoretical/managerial implications.

7.3 Managerial implications

The results help users to better understand the importance of appropriately organized work for employees and employees' concerns related to work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic in Slovenian companies and are indicating a broader picture of the organizational conditions in the European Union (EU). Also, the results will significantly contribute to the design of appropriate working environment for employees. It is important to understand the mechanisms supporting positive mental health beyond the safety of the working environment. The findings of research can help employers or managers to create new appropriate working conditions during and also after the COVID-19 pandemic. Building a unique and positive work environment is one of the best ways to get employees satisfied and effective.

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