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# When Remote Work is Inevitable: Experiences of Remote Workers During the Pandemic

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## ABSTRACT

Remote working was obligatory rather than optional for many workers during Covid-19 pandemic. We interviewed 23 white-collar participants, who were forced to work from home in this period, using semi-structured questionnaires to determine their experiences in the remote working process and to identify the factors influencing the efficiency of remote working. We qualitatively evaluated the participants' responses and determined seven themes: location flexibility, time flexibility, belonging and status, communication, recordability/concrete evidence, anxiety of being invisible and being forgotten, and the view of other people on remote workers. The most important factor determining the participants' perception on these themes is the nature of the work. If the work requires constant and quick communication among different partners, remote working is not perceived to be as efficient as working in an office. Works involving tasks that can be performed individually and independently appear to generate more satisfaction in a remote working environment. Regardless of the nature of the work, personal development opportunities, such as trainings, seminars and workshops, provided by the employers to their remote working employees during the pandemic seem to alleviate negative consequences of remote working on the employees to some degree.

**Keywords:** Remote Work, Home Office, Covid-19 Pandemic.

**JEL Classification Codes:** M12, J81, J24

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## INTRODUCTION

Remote working is defined as "a flexible work arrangement whereby workers work in locations, remote from their central offices or production facilities, the worker has no personal contact with co-workers there, but is able to communicate with them using technology" (Di Martino & Wirth, 1990, p. 530). Advances in information technologies allowed companies to practice remote working since 1980's. With this working model, it has become possible to work remotely by using computers and as a result the necessity of doing the work in the office environment within certain times has been eliminated. Generally, this model has been preferred in companies dealing with design, software, translation, architecture, accounting and press release because of the suitability of jobs for remote working in such areas. Covid-19 pandemic, however, forced many other occupational groups to utilize remote working which they had never experienced before (Meşhur, 2007; Tozlu, 2011; Gallup, 2017).

The remote working model, which had already become widespread as a result of developments in digital technologies, became one of the most important agenda items of many businesses with the Covid-19 outbreak. There are indications that remote working will differ between countries and businesses and will become more widespread in different dimensions and forms. This increased flexibility in scheduling and executing tasks improves employees' perception of autonomy (TÜBA, 2020). Organizations around the world are trying to find new approaches to cope with such a dispersed workforce and to find solutions to new problems, but it is uncertain which of the created approaches will be more permanent (Optimist, 2020). From this point of view, the necessity of conducting a research with employees has emerged in order to determine the needs and experiences of the workforce in the remote working model and to establish corporate habits. The advantages and disadvantages of remote working have been identified in the existing remote working literature prior to the pandemic. This study was planned to identify new

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variables that affect the remote working model and previously unidentified advantages and disadvantages of remote working in the existing literature.

Remote working had become compulsory with the pandemic and forced many employees from different sectors to start working remotely. The way each employee experiences this process differs depending on their demographic characteristics and the structure of the job. This study focuses its perspective on the remote workers and their experiences.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

While remote work was optional and preferred by some occupational groups before the Covid-19 crisis, the pandemic has made working remotely a necessity. Highly advanced information technology hardware, the output-oriented coordination and control systems, the experience in the use of flexible working hours, the size of the enterprise and the sector of activity play key roles in the adoption of remote work (Tokarchuk et al., 2021). In their research, Belzunegui-Eraso and Erro-Garces (2020) aimed to show how companies use remote work to ensure the safety of their employees and to ensure the continuity of economic activity in companies. With the development of digital technology, many businesses, regardless of size, have been using flexible working models from time to time for years. Researchers have studied the effect of remote working on employees, employers, organizations and society from various aspects (p.14).

Izthak (2002) listed the advantages and disadvantages of remote working using a methodological examination of the individual, organization and community components potentially affected by remote working. The advantages of remote working are 1) increased autonomy and flexibility for individuals, 2) capacity increase in human resources, 3) savings in direct expenses for organizations 4) ability to address the needs of people with special needs and 5) saving from infrastructure and energy. The disadvantages are potential expenses related to transitions to new work models and a possible sense of isolation for individuals which may lead to danger of creating detached individuals.

Tremblay and Thomsin (2012) focused on the advantages and disadvantages from perspective of remote workers. They identified reduced interference from colleagues, work schedule flexibility, opportunity for individual and occupational development and improvement, reduced time spent for commuting,

better organization of working hours and better working opportunities, as well as the better work-life balance, management of family or personal responsibilities as dominant advantages of remote working. In contrast to the advantages, there are employees who think that working remotely from home has its own set of drawbacks. First, boundaries between private and work life progressively blurs when work is done remotely from home. Employees chose time and location of work to a large extent, this flexibility, however, results in an imbalance between personal and work life, blurring the boundaries roles (Naswall et al., 2008). In addition, since those who work from home do not go to work, they are also cut off from the opportunities offered by the business and social environment. This can leave home workers lonely and weaken their social skills.

Similar to occupational satisfaction (Smith et al., 2018), the advantages and disadvantages of remote working vary depending on individual differences. Raisiene et al. (2020) examined the relationships between participant age and work variables with participants who were forced to work remotely during the pandemic in Lithuania. The older participants tend to emphasize the disadvantages of telecommunication, whereas the youngsters tend to possess more qualifications required for remote working such as good independent working, communication and time management skills.

A common issue with remote working is that remote workers can feel socially invisible (Harris, 2003). Remote work researchers have adopted many theoretical perspectives, such as social identity theory or social isolation theory, to show that remote work leads to negative social consequences Perry et al. (2018) emphasized that since remote workers are physically distant from the organizational environment, identity formation would be negatively affected; references for social support and identity formation would be lower, which would create weaker emotional bonds with the organization and their colleagues. They stated that this physical separation would reduce the opportunity to establish social connections, and as a result, remote workers would show lower satisfaction and performance. This situation can be more pronounced for high-intensity remote workers. Belle et al. (2015) examined the personal and professional satisfaction of such remote workers, the support and participation they receive from others, and the essence of their organizational belonging experiences. While the emotional language used by the participants in places where their experiences of not belonging were expressed includes expressions such

as ‘to be sad, not cared for and alienated’, the structural language includes implications such as “a ropeless kite”, “being on an island alone”.

Reduction in mentoring opportunities is a disadvantage of remote working for early career young employees. This can have prolonged adverse impacts on the professional development and career advancement of remote workers in terms of learning and networking opportunities (Gascoigne, 2021). Dambrin (2004) investigated the impact of remote working on the manager-employee relationships with remotely working sales people in four dimensions: coordination, division of labour, evaluation/control and compliance. He found that remote working facilitated communication between remote hierarchical levels by reducing formal communication between employees and direct managers, and reduced dependency autonomy of employees for their managers. The development of employees’ perceptions of autonomy depends on flexibility in the planning and implementation of tasks. Working from home allows for controlling attire, ventilation, heating and lighting which may contribute to increased feeling of autonomy. In contrast to this autonomy, those who have remote work tasks online may also experience a reduced sense of freedom because electronic oversighting of work is fairly easy and, at the same time, confidential and continuous. While managers fear the loss of control over their subordinates, employees fear isolation and knowledge impoverishment. Employees who choose to work remotely can also see that their commitment are questioned by managers, and managers may have to change their strategies to monitor employees from behaviour-based supervision to output-based controls such as auditing by goals (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007).

Visibility is critical to performance appraisals, and such appraisals are crucial to career success. Therefore, it is natural for remote workers may experience such concerns. Remote working is often perceived as synonymous with time off and remote workers tend to feel the need to prove their virtual presence, increasingly resorting to actions such as sending messages to their managers and colleagues to indicate that they are reachable and to try to reduce feelings of isolation. Remote working is often perceived as synonymous with time off and remote workers tend to feel the need to prove their virtual presence, increasingly resorting to actions such as sending messages to their managers and colleagues to indicate that they are reachable and to try to reduce feelings of isolation. In this context, there is a real concern that out of sight is indeed out of mind. It has been observed that e-mails and telephones

are used not only to exchange information, but also to inform employers that they are at work at home. Thus, it has been stated that a behavioural norm that increases technocratic administrative control by forming the basis of social control has emerged. This has led to an obvious paradoxical experience of social workplace, where remote workers now feel chained to their workstations at home (Sewell & Taskin, 2015). A common recommendation in the remote work literature is that the dwell on output controls will increase when employees work remotely. Sewell and Taskin (2015) stated that suitability for remote work can be determined in part by whether an employee’s output can be measured or not. Felstead et al. (2003) indicated that a widely recommended approach to managing remote workers was to monitor outputs rather than inputs or behaviours. Similarly, Illegems and Verbeke (2004) argued that remote work would require setting clear performance goals and criteria. Richardson and McKenna (2014) found that remote workers felt more pressure to achieve performance goals than those who do not work remotely.

Tokarchuk et al. (2021) sought answers to questions such as remote working, which was adopted during the emergency period could be applied after the emergency ended and how it would contribute to the sustainability of cities. They emphasized that the adoption of remote working would require a shift in management style and should be replaced by direct supervision and coordination based on reciprocal trust. In this context, the organizational capability that businesses should have is ability to manage by objectives and performance.

In addition to all the above, the characteristics of the job and the nature of the tasks are also important variables that affect the remote work experience. These variables affect how remote workers structure their days. Jobs that require real-time communication require accessibility during working hours and push non-interactive tasks out of these times. Dimitrova (2003) examined remote workers with different job types to review the issue of control and autonomy in remote working. In the remote working process, it was concluded that the control mechanisms were better developed, and more comprehensive working rules were available in the activities with standard routine duties, while the remote workers with non-routine duties had fewer rules and could work independently of their supervisors.

In a study conducted by Başol and Çömlekçi (2021) with white-collar workers with remote working experience in different regions of Türkiye, it was observed that the level of positive attitudes towards remote working increased

when the organization of remote working was carried out in a planned and regular manner, the technical/digital infrastructure was up to date and sufficient, the education levels were higher, the workload of the employee did not increase, and care was taken to spare time for family and private life. Hamouche (2021) states that all human resource functions and the general literature about HRM has been greatly impacted by Covid-19. The present literature on remote working does not offer a comprehensive evaluation of the mandatory remote working during Covid-19 pandemic (Waizenegger et al., 2020).

This study was conducted to determine which aspects of remote working are perceived as advantages or disadvantages by remote workers in the context of Covid-19 pandemic when almost all white collar workers were forced to work remotely. We put forward two main research questions in this descriptive study: 1) What do employees perceive as advantages and disadvantages of remote working when it is inevitable? and 2) In addition to the concepts about remote working already investigated in the literature, what new concepts can we identify about remote working?

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

To reach the study goals we used the qualitative research approach. We developed a semi-structured interview form and to improve clarity of the interview questions we conducted pilot interviews with three white collar workers we personally knew who were working remotely. We obtained ethics approval, selected the participants and conducted the interviews. Data analysis was based on content and descriptive analyses. Details of these steps are explained below.

### **Interview form Development**

We examined the literature on remote working and came up with a semi-structured interview form with 37 open ended questions. To ensure the clarity and validity of the questions we conducted pilot interviews with three white collar workers who we personally knew. Using the feedback from the pilot interviews we reduced the number of interview questions to 31. Eight of these questions were on demographic characteristics and 23 were open-ended questions related to remote working experiences of the participants. At this stage we obtained ethics committee approval to proceed with our study. The interview form is available from the authors upon request.

### **Participant Selection**

Our target population was white collar remote workers who had no previous remote working experience but forced to work remotely due to Covid-19 pandemic. To reach to potential participants we disseminated the information about the study and our contact information in closed messaging groups. Once we selected our initial participants among the respondents conforming with the selection criteria, we used snowball sampling method to reach additional participants. This process resulted in 23 participants. We tried to ensemble a group of participants as diverse as possible in terms of sectors and positions.

### **Interviews**

We collected data for this study by conducting a 30 to 45 minutes long on-line interview with each of the 23 participants using ZOOM video conferencing software (Zoom Video Communications, Inc.). The interviews took place in the time period when the participants were working remotely (between 06 March and 24 April 2021). The questions on the interview form were asked in the same order to each participant. We recorded the interviews with the consent of the participants and transcribed the contents into computer environment.

### **Data Evaluation and Theme Identification**

In order to ensure validity and reliability in qualitative research, credibility, transferability, consistency and confirmability criteria must be met. For credibility, we recorded the interviews. For transferability, we detailed all stages of the research, reported the raw data with detailed descriptions and supported it with direct quotations. The transcripts of the interviews were subjected to content (Crabtree & Miller, 1999) and descriptive analyses (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In order to ensure the verifiability of the data, we (the authors) first analysed the datasets individually and independently, and then worked together to create the name of the code, themes and sub-themes (Creswell, 2002).

## **RESULTS**

We interviewed six male and 17 female participants. Twelve participants were married and 11 participants were single. Nine participants had children. Ages of the participants ranged from 23 to 50 (mean = 36.3). Eighteen participants resided in Istanbul, three participants in Izmir and two participants in Ankara. Participants worked in companies operating in the IT, finance, service, health, electronic commerce and aviation sectors (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Demographic characteristics of the participants.

Participant	Gender	Age	Profession	Industry	Years of Seniority	Marital Status	Home City	Number of Children
P1	Male	32	Computer Engineer	Information Technologies	8	Single	Istanbul	None
P2	Male	50	Software Developer	Information Technologies	23	Married	Istanbul	2
P3	Female	27	Computer Engineer	Information Technologies	2	Single	Istanbul	None
P4	Female	41	Lawyer	Banking	16	Married	Istanbul	2
P5	Female	35	Bank Employee	Banking	7	Married	Izmir	1
P6	Female	42	Assistant	Banking	22	Married	Istanbul	1
P7	Female	38	Senior Payroll Specialist	Service Industry / Consultancy	16	Married	Istanbul	1
P8	Female	39	Bank Employee	Banking	18	Single	Istanbul	2
P9	Male	32	Foreign Trade	Health	1.5	Married	Istanbul	None
P10	Female	29	Chain Stores Sales Manager	Fast Moving Consumer Goods	6	Married	Istanbul	None
P11	Male	28	Information Systems Engineer	Information Technologies	5	Single	Istanbul	None
P12	Female	27	Human Resources Specialist	Electronic Commerce	4	Single	Istanbul	None
P13	Female	29	Medical Representative	Health	4	Married	Ankara	None
P14	Female	40	Lawyer	Banking	16	Single	Istanbul	None
P15	Female	30	Marketing Analyst	Information Technologies	6	Married	Izmir	None
P16	Male	32	Marketing Manager	Aviation Industry	7	Married	Istanbul	1

P17	Female	39	Marketing Employee	Banking	17	Single	Istanbul	None
P18	Female	48	Computer Engineer	Information Technologies	21	Married	Istanbul	2
P19	Female	49	Medical Representative	Health	5	Single	Ankara	None
P20	Male	45	Computer Engineer	Information Technologies	22	Married	Istanbul	2
P21	Female	23	Marketing Specialist	Electronic Commerce	1.5	Single	Istanbul	None
P22	Female	33	Bank Employee	Banking	8	Single	Izmir	None
P23	Female	47	Bank Employee	Banking	21	Single	Istanbul	None

The codes, categories and themes created by making content and descriptive analysis of the data obtained as a result of the study are shown in the Table 2. In the theme of "location flexibility", we took into account the desire of individuals to live in different cities from the institution for which they worked and their desire to pursue a career in institutions in different countries without leaving their own country. In addition, we evaluated the desire to be protected from the negative effects of factors such as uncontrollable noise, hygiene, heating and lighting in office environments within the scope of this theme. We determined the theme of "time flexibility" by taking into account the codes of not limiting daily work to working hours, being accessible at any time, blurring of the boundaries between private and business life. We created the theme of "belonging and status" based on the need for individuals to belong and be respected. We determined the "communication" theme with the written and verbal communication code that the employees establish with their colleagues and managers. We created the "recordability/concrete evidence" theme by using the codes of recording how a job is done using information technologies and using them when appropriate. We created the theme of "anxiety about being invisible and being forgotten" based on the code that employees are not present in the organizational environment, that they want to prove to their managers whether they are working or not, and that they need extra communication with the manager. The perspective of employees who do not have remote working experience also affects remote

workers. For this purpose, we created the theme of "the view of other people on remote workers".

### Location Flexibility

In the location-independent flexible working model, there is no obligation to be in a certain place or commute to a physical office. work can be done wherever there is a computer and internet. While in an office environment there can be problems with lighting, heating, ventilation, decoration, privacy of conversations, etc. These factors can be controlled by working from home. Our participants talked of this situation as follows:

- We work in an open office, you know. How can I say it? I am not a person who likes very hot, for example, I like colder environments. Here, when the air conditioners work a little, our other friends want to make the environment warmer by saying, "Oh, I'm so cold." (P23)
- There are no windows that can be opened in the plazas. I don't find the ventilation system healthy. There's only one toilet on the floors, and we're hundreds of people working. The kitchens where we buy tea and coffee are very small. Hygiene worries me as long as I'm in the office. (P14)

In addition, location flexibility allows them to find resources around the world independent of a physical location. They can also work for a certain time without leaving their own country. The experience of working

**Table 2.** Themes, categories and codes determined based on the interviews.

Themes	Categories	Codes
<b>Location flexibility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Career</li> <li>- City selection advantage</li> <li>- Work environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The working environment is not limited to a specific place</li> <li>- Desire to live in a different city</li> <li>- Desire to build a career in different countries and institutions</li> <li>- Control over the work environment</li> </ul>
<b>Time flexibility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Time and cost savings</li> <li>- Uncertain working hours</li> <li>- Work-life balance</li> <li>- Control over the work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Eliminating time and costs associated with commuting</li> <li>- Blurring the boundaries of work and private life</li> <li>- Have flexible working hours</li> <li>- Increased individual responsibility</li> </ul>
<b>Belonging and status</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Belonging</li> <li>- Status</li> <li>- Non-appointment meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Managers' concerns about losing control and status</li> <li>- Improvement in working conditions</li> <li>- Decreased sense of belonging</li> <li>- Opportunities of going to work (meeting with friends without a pre-arrangement, shopping on the way home)</li> </ul>
<b>Communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Information sharing</li> <li>- Communication glitches/misunderstandings</li> <li>- Virtual interviews</li> <li>- Inability to socialize</li> <li>- Written communication</li> <li>- Superior-subordinate relations</li> <li>- Relations with colleagues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Inability to make short communication and small discussions in the office</li> <li>- More socialization in the workplace</li> <li>- Weakening of relations with decision makers/managers</li> <li>- Difficulty in self-expression</li> </ul>
<b>Recordability / Concrete evidence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Gaining later access</li> <li>- Provide control</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ability to access video and meeting recordings later on</li> <li>- Ability to control whether the work is done correctly and its quality</li> <li>- Access to the system at any time</li> </ul>
<b>Anxiety of being invisible and being forgotten</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Not being visible</li> <li>- Anxiety of being forgotten</li> <li>- Fear of missing out</li> <li>- Social isolation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The need to prove to the manager that you're working and the need for extra communication</li> <li>- The need to remind yourself</li> <li>- Missing updates while away</li> </ul>
<b>The view of other people on remote workers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Boundary violations</li> <li>- Perception of comfort</li> <li>- Perception of being on leave/on vacation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Being perceived as not working at home</li> <li>- Being disturbed during working hours</li> </ul>

remotely with the pandemic resulted in employees being more courageous in preferring international companies in terms of employment. One of our participants expressed this situation as follows:

- Because of the satisfaction I get from working remotely, I am more courageous at the point of starting a remote job in the international arena. In other words, at the point of my career development, I want to experience working remotely in a more competent position, in more multinational companies. (P11)

The participants, who did not want to attract the noise and traffic density of big cities and wanted to save time on the road, stated that they could continue their work in Istanbul by living in small cities or villages and working remotely.

- I can go and live in a quiet place in Antalya instead of in Istanbul. As long as I'm not disconnected from work, as long as there're no face-to-face meetings, that's fine. (P2)
- I would like to live with my family by the sea. It would be very nice to do the job I want and be with my family without experiencing the noise and traffic of Istanbul. (P3)

### **Time Flexibility**

With the transition to remote working, one of the most important problems experienced by the participants was the stretching of the concept of working hours. While remote workers have more discretion in the timing of their work, the requirement to be available whenever needed has also removed their protection against long working hours. The participants conveyed the continuous connection situation that technology provides, or even imposes, as follows:

- On weekdays, we used to leave the computer there when we left the office unless there was a pre-planned job. There's no such thing right now. When a job comes, we have the computer anyway, we are at home and we have to do it directly. (P1)
- Always being at home, being accessible has resulted in around-the-clock demand from our customers and the teams we work with. (P11)
- I am spending all my waking hours dedicated to work. (P12)

Workers in these types of jobs said they were very unhappy working remotely and that the quality of their work declined, especially if the job required communicating with others.

- Especially on weekends, my colleagues with whom I have a close relationship, say, "Your system is open, can you send me this? and I can't say no. I'm sending it." (P5)
- Working from home, the concept of working hours is gone. I work every moment of the day. I don't know how to solve this situation. (P8)
- I can't turn off my computer at all while I am working at home. If someone from the system asks a question, I keep it open even when I'm sleeping so that I can answer it immediately. I wake up at night and check. (P10)

Those who work in project-based and result-oriented jobs stated that they were more productive because they could plan their own working hours.

- In my job, there are legal penalties if the job is not finished on time. So I adjust my working days and hours accordingly. (P7)
- As long as the job is completed on the specified date, there's no problem. I am very pleased. The number of meetings also decreased. I can plan my own time. (P11)
- The work I have to do is very clear. I know the deadline. It's been very good for me. I arrange my time at home the way I want. (P1)

### **Belonging and Status**

Belonging to a group or a place and having a status are two of the prominent human needs. The feelings of remote employees regarding the sense of belonging due to their absence from the workplace are as follows:

- I can't see my friends very much outside work. We have to make appointments to see each other, and it is difficult to determine which day we all have together. It's already a natural process for us at work. Everyone agrees to that place at that time. Therefore, we meet in a natural way, without the need for any appointment, to spend time with those people. Belonging to somewhere makes our work easier. (P4)
- Every day at work, there are many faces whose names I have no idea. I don't have any conversation

with them, but I know them. We smile and say, "Good morning" when we get in the elevator. We see each other in the same environment at lunch. You feel like you belong somewhere, like you have another house. Now that sense of belonging is gone, suddenly, the only place you belong is home. You are like a stranger when you go there. For a year or two we haven't been there. We have forgotten the face we saw in that elevator, and we'll feel like strangers when we go in again. (P8)

One participant, who was working as a manager, expressed how he felt in the online meeting in terms of his status:

- There are very clear lines in the work. You have a separate room, so whatever we call the office room, you have something like that. There is a wall between you and the employees, but you are only one of the sixteen frames in the online meeting. (P16)

### Communication

There is evidence that remote teams face significantly more communication difficulties than face-to-face teams (ILO, 2020, p.10). When communicating electronically, employees are likely to share less information with their colleagues and have difficulties in perceiving and interpreting the information they encounter. Participants also stated that they encountered communication problems during the remote working process, and that while they could get answers to their questions with short interviews or small business-related discussions in the office environment, this was not possible remotely.

- So no matter how hard we try, our facial expressions, our smiles don't really match up these online things or on the phone. There are so much misunderstandings. Already the face of the e-mail is very cold. (P10)
- Instead of sending an e-mail, those who worked side by side with their managers in the office would go to their desk and ask questions and return to work. In this process, they had trouble because they couldn't do it and couldn't call 30 times a day each time. (P14)
- For example, I write to the person I work with from the communication platform used by the workplace and ask if he is available, and he can't look at it at that moment. Maybe we can meet in three hours, but when I'm in the office, I can watch

for his free moment and get my work done in fifteen minutes. (P9)

Many companies strive to provide informal online contact opportunities for employees to help employees to connect with their managers and co-workers. These are generally aimed at relieving employees from isolation or anxiety created by the current situation through social interactions. Our participants expressed this situation as follows:

- An online meeting environment has been created where everyone gathers for one hour a week. Sometimes writers and journalists are guests. Sometimes friends who have worked in our company before and started their own business come and talk about what has happened in their lives and how they have changed, and sometimes we chat in a free format. Thus, they have enabled us to socialize by re-establishing our bond with our friends. (P18)
- We were just talking business, and we realized that it wasn't good for us. We started to having online meetings where we could improve each other technically once a week. (P3)

The participants expressed the changes in their formal and informal relationships with their colleagues as follows:

- I lost a lot of social ties with the people I worked with. Working online and working from home has inevitably made everything a business goal. (P15)
- I don't ask, "How are you?" every day anymore because I get called all the time. Actually, you're just talking about business. I think there was more "effing around" going around at work. (P16)
- We used to talk about business while working at work, but apart from that, we used to chat with a lot of people while we finished our meals and had coffee at lunch break. Since we don't have such a chance now, I only call you if I have a job, otherwise I'm not calling you, I'm not saying let's have a chat. (P12)
- When I switched to my home office with the people with whom I had informal conversations in the office environment, we only started having formal conversations. In addition, I was able to establish informal relations with people with whom I had a formal relationship. I started getting to know different sides of people as well. (P8)

### **Recordability/Concrete Evidence**

Going to the mentor every time to ask questions about the points that the learner forgets or gets stuck on in newly learned task will disrupt the flow of the work and prevent the mentor from planning her/his own time effectively. Recording the mentor's training process will enable the new learner to benefit from this recording when needed. The statements of the participants on this subject are as follows:

- When new recruits would ask me something, I would tell them, then they would forget and ask me again and again. Now he records what I tell them, they don't ask. They open the record and look at it. So it has been incredibly beneficial. (P3)
- When I was in the office, I would do my job, turn off the screen at the end of the shift and go home. When I had something on my mind, I would have to wait until the next day. Since I work from home, when I have a question, I can immediately open the screen and correct it. (P8)
- Having our office computers accessible at all times provided flexibility. We can save and make changes whenever we want. (P14)

### **Anxiety of Being Invisible and Being Forgotten**

The shift to remote work while working in an office setting will likely to change the frequency, quality, and by definition, the form of one's interactions with other members of the organization. Therefore, remote work has the potential to reduce the quality of the subordinate-superior relationship (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). It is seen that remote workers have been worried that they will not be able to benefit from promotions and other rewards because their daily face-to-face relations with their managers have decreased and that they may be adversely affected in terms of status loss and career development (Naktiyok & İşcan, 2003, p. 56). Employees who were away from their managers and colleagues during the remote working process had to make more efforts to remind themselves and prove that they were working.

The evaluations on this topic were expressed by the participants as follows;

- In terms of career, it's actually a bit of a negative situation. We're starting to lose relationships; relationships with the company are weakening. In other words, relationships with decision makers are weakening. (P18)

- Because we work remotely, it's possible that we've been forgotten. We need to remind ourselves more in this process. Look, we need to try to prove more that I am here. (P8)
- There is a desire to prove to one's manager that one is working. So I turn on my computer, but I may turn on my computer and go to bed, or I may be eating. I constantly need to contact my manager and explain in detail what I'm doing. (P12)

Besides the participants who stated that they used verbal communication more intensely due to the anxiety of being forgotten and not being visible, there were also participants who stated that written communication would provide an advantage. Written communication has advantages such as being concrete and permanent, being able to convey the message without the limitations of time and place limitations, being able to be reviewed and saved again upon request or in case of disagreement, and providing a document (Küçük, 2017). Some of the participants stated that written communication allowed for a more egalitarian and democratic approach to be visible with the following words:

- Working remotely has made written communication more important than verbal communication. While there are face-to-face conversations, communicating by writing and sharing a note provides something more democratic by being visible. The use of written communication is actually more egalitarian. (P15)
- When I was working in the office, I did not need to explain what I was doing because my manager would see what I was doing in the office. Since I work remotely, I take pictures of everything I do and post them. I report how I use my budget and send it. I use written communication instead of verbal communication. (P19)

When individuals work remotely, they are far from opportunities to develop interpersonal networks within the organization. Fear of missing opportunities, such as an informal interactive learning process, a team synergy and sharing ideas with other employees, is one of the concerns about working remotely. This supports the finding of Cooper and Kurland's (2002) finding that remote workers were more likely to perceive themselves professionally and socially isolated because, interpersonal networks in organization prevented them from building relationships and accessing information that could advance their professional careers.

- I think that working from home may not be very advantageous in a situation where some people return to the office. Not being able to go to lunch, drink tea and coffee and chat can be annoying. In the office environment, I would like to continue to communicating and learning with those around me. (P14)

### The View of Other People on Remote Workers

The statements of the participants regarding the perception of remote workers by their family and friends as if they are not working are as follows:

- Even though we are online all the time, we always finishing work, when we talk to people outside, we received such reactions as “Oh are you at home, Oh how nice of course.” The house is comfortable and so on. I have never once put my feet up on the couch and worked. (P5)
- There may be boundary violations. My relatives act as if I’m on a vacation. (P14)
- “Aren’t you already at home?” This question really makes me sick to my stomach. “Yes, I am at home, but I am working.” Even our managers say “why didn’t you reply, you know it’s during working hours” if they don’t receive a response shortly after sending a message. I am a human being and I maybe fulfilling my human needs when they send that message. (P19)

Due to the negative perspective of the environment on remote working, it is seen that the participants are uncomfortable with this situation and reduce their interest in the concept of remote working.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Due to the inevitability of remote working with the Covid-19 pandemic, many employees were force to work from home, creating a context where the applicability of existing knowledge on remote working is questioned. In this study, conducted with 23 participants, we aimed to determine the experiences of each participant in the remote working process. We sought answers to the questions about advantages and disadvantages of compulsory remote working to see whether it would be preferred and possible to realize a transition to such model. The advantages and disadvantages of remote working were evaluated separately for each theme. We found that the themes of location and time flexibility differ depending on demographics of participants. Employees who had children or had dependents at

home were often interrupted during their work hours and needed to create additional time during the day to finish their work. Location flexibility reduced the negative effects of uncontrollable physical factors such as uncontrollable noise, hygiene, heating and lighting in open office environments. In addition, it allowed people, who did not want to experience the traffic, noise and cost of living problems brought about by big city life, to work in rural areas. It may increase the employability of people in different cities and countries. Information and communication technologies, which enabled the employee to perform the act of working wherever and whenever s/he wanted, also allowed the employer to constantly monitor and supervise the employee, and moreover, to be able to reach the employee continuously regardless of working hours and workplace. Technological devices that provided access to work-related issues at any time, wherever and whenever, could actually become a means of infiltration of work into the time that should be reserved for rest. This caused more blurring of the boundaries rather than providing time flexibility (Naswall et al., 2008, p. 5; Kıcı, 2019, p. 178), eliminating the flexibility of the individual to determine her/his own time and making more effort to fulfil the demands. Therefore, it was of great importance to determine which hours the employee was available (Dimitrova, 2003).

Toygur Eroğlu, et al. (2023) found that relationships are negatively affected when the time spent working remotely during the day exceeds six hours. In addition, the perception of financial contribution and development of skills are also negatively affected.

If the work is result-oriented and the remote worker finds this way of working efficient in terms of time and location flexibility, remote working seems to be effective. Therefore, it would be appropriate to use remote working when both the nature of the job, the employee’s finding it productive, and the organization’s capabilities support it. Among the participants of this study we found that especially those working in software and result-oriented jobs were satisfied with this working model. For tasks that require communication and coordination, employees have to spend more time on one-on-one meetings or team controls due to physical separation of teams (Reisenwitz, 2020). Remote workers had concerns about how their performance would be evaluated, how their promotion processes would be determined, and how the audit would be conducted due to lack of visibility. These concerns went as far as the fear of being fired. Many companies saw giving their employees the right to control their work as an important motivational tool to

keep them in the company. In studies dealing with the relationship between remote work and the employee's level of personal control over job (Lim & Teo, 2000; Handy & Mokhtarian, 1996), it was emphasized that remote working could increase control over one's job if the job was complex and required autonomy, remote working could increase one's control over one's work. There is suggestion that people who prefer controlling the pace of their work and avoid in person interactions would be successful remote workers Bailey and Kurland (2002). It was also supported in our work that business-oriented people who liked to work online with their own schedule may prefer to work remotely.

In the remote working model, employees can have more authority, the opportunity to evaluate and control their mistakes in their own work life. As a result of the ease of recording information with the developing information technologies, the fact that the subject can be recorded, especially at the learning stage of a work, allows the individual working remotely to access this information and records when he/she needs it. This is a great advantage for the manager in terms of avoiding time loss. However, such a situation also imposes more responsibility on the remote worker. The fact that the flexibility of time and space in remote working imposes more responsibilities on the remote worker has also been supported by many studies (Dambrin, 2004).

Şimşek Demirbağ and Demirbağ (2022) showed that the full-time remote working system increases the burden on pandemic employees due to the absence of crisis management strategies for this process. Therefore, it may be useful to create more systematic remote working arrangements.

İlhan (2021) states that new legal regulations to be developed on remote working can help establishing work-life balance. Being at work makes it possible not only to socialize, but also to meet with colleagues every day without having to make any special arrangements or effort to meet. Similarly, the ability to take advantage of the social opportunities (shopping malls, cafes and restaurants) offered by the workplace and the environment in which it is located is seen as an advantage of commuting to and from the workplace. Some participants stated that greetings in the service bus or at the workplace made them feel that they belonged to the workplace. One of our participants stated that from a manager's perspective, even having a private room at the workplace provides status in order to draw more clear boundaries. In the online meetings he held with his team during the remote working period, he perceives

becoming one of the frames on the screen as a situation that leads to a loss of status.

Office-based workers in Türkiye and around the world need a great deal of technological, sociological and psychological support and training to adjust to the new remote working model. Understanding how these sudden changes are experienced is important for practitioners as they chart forward on what is needed to meet the needs of employees. Authoritarian managers face different difficulties in motivating their employees in virtual environments compared to more participative and empathetic team managers, and therefore have different training and development needs. For remote working to become a successful workplace alternative, managers need to learn how to be effective remote mentors. During this period, many companies organized various trainings sessions, seminars and workshops for their employees under the name of the club for the "personal development" of their employees, or purchased them as a service from companies operating in this field and offered them to their employees. These clubs can be in the form of obtaining information on a new topic, such as artificial intelligence club, mobile technology club, or they can be in the form of clubs for healthy living and interests. Our participants requested that the companies they work with effectively implement such activities effectively in case of a transition to the remote working model after the pandemic. At this point, it emerges that there is a need for platforms where managers and employees can interact informally and develop interpersonal relationships. This is because the common values specific to the company, which are formed by the people working together, disappear in the remote working process, and the weakening of these values, which can be expressed as the business culture, causes the alienation of the employees towards the company.

Providing flexible time, flexible space, technologically appropriate work arrangements, and family-friendly work arrangements at home will be effective in helping remote workers adapt to this new way of working (Shirmohammadi et al. 2022). Başol and Çömlekçi (2022) developed an instrument to measure attitudes and perceptions towards remote working. In their study using this tool, they concluded that technical and social support, the work environment of remote organizations, and skill development practices (training, increasing digital skills, etc.) positively affect employees' attitudes toward remote working (Başol & Çömlekçi, 2022). The implementation of remote working in companies will vary depending on the type of the work, the suitability of

the organization and the department where the work is done, and the needs and expectations of the employee. Transparency of working hours, job descriptions and the identity of contact persons will be preferred by employees as it reduces uncertainty in the remote working model.

This study is limited to employees working in large companies operating in Ankara, Istanbul and Izmir. In future studies to be conducted with remote workers living in different provinces, their remote working experiences can be compared with the remote working experiences of employees working in big cities. Employee's experiences will ensure the effectiveness of the policies that organizations will develop for remote working practices. In future studies, it is thought that conducting comparative international studies that analyse employees' remote working experiences through in-depth interviews will contribute to the remote working literature.

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