

The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on conventional work settings

The impact of
COVID-19
pandemic

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Abstract

Purpose – To give insight into human resource (HR) policy makers of the impact of the abrupt change in working conditions as reported from their primary stakeholders – the employees.

Design/methodology/approach – Reported from a first-person point of view, 192 employees from Kuwait who are currently working from home were surveyed as to how the lockdown circumstances have impacted their conventional work expectations. The study compares the old working conditions (OWC) to the current working conditions (CWC) to give insight into the overall sentiments of the abrupt changes to the workplace.

Findings – It was found that most employees agreed that OWC need to be reviewed, and that the general sentiment was almost equally split on the efficiency of CWC in comparison to OWC, yet the majority was enjoying the flexible conditions. Moreover, the majority of respondents found that overall conventional work elements either remained the same or had been impacted positively rather than negatively. Also, if given an option of a hybrid model inclusive of partly working remotely and partly working on-site, a considerable majority reported that they are able to efficiently conduct at least 80% of their work expectation. Finally, it was found that employee expectation is changing as they consider post COVID-19 conditions.

Research limitations/implications – This research was conducted using virtual crowd-sourcing methods to administer the survey and may have been enhanced should other methods have been integrated for data gathering. Also, a more comprehensive phenomenological approach could have been incorporated to add a qualitative method to the investigation. This could have freed the results of answer limitation and experience bias. Moreover, it is good practice to involve both quantitative and qualitative elements to any research when possible. Finally, future research can benefit from a bigger pool of participants so as to gain a clearer picture.

Originality/value – This research will give policy makers a look at what needs to be reviewed/changed for a successful roll-out of remote work in accordance with their original strategies.

Keywords Virtual work, Remote work, Employee efficiency, Workplace and COVID-19

Paper type Research paper

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Introduction

During these unprecedented times, the world as people know it has come to a halt. As much of the world is being affected by the outbreak of the deadly COVID-19 disease, institutes are finding it difficult to keep their businesses afloat and are continuously trying to find innovative ways to do so. The unfortunate pandemic of the coronavirus has left both employers and employees with countless questions and much uncertainty. As people stand relatively idle and absorb the ripples of the virus in various ways, some are continuing to work from home to one degree or another. In such cases, the emotional stress of confinement is then compounded as the pressure of a new workspace mounts.

As the struggle continues to unfold, employees are generally unsure of their expectations both to and from their employers. Therefore, it seems essentially important to monitor the situation and take the primary stakeholders' points of view into consideration. With that, employees who are currently working from home are subject to the most difficult part of this rushed and unexpected transition. Although the basic idea of working remotely is rather generally understood, it has somewhat been frowned upon as being a productive and efficient method to get the job done. It may even carry a connotation of laziness and lack of motivation. The pessimistic consensus has led to many local institutes uneager to entertain the idea; until now, a concept which was perceived as a professional taboo to many has now deemed itself worthy.

Perhaps a monomodel of the workplace setting is no longer an option. After all, the binary system of workplace attendance expectations has never been proven more efficient or more



successful in comparison to a nontraditional one. As a matter of fact, in comparison to its most relevant equal, freelancers have used remote working conditions successfully throughout the years. However, there are no data to prove otherwise. Thus, employers should look toward more creative solutions, ones that are based on the feedback from their employees, as they could possibly be finding themselves in a favorable position financially. Accordingly, given the current social distancing measures, a hybrid model could possibly prove to be effective.

In this article, we examine the impact of the new norm of working from home on several factors. We investigate the current conditions against conventional methods and expectations of working on the job site. Moreover, we inspect the future outlook and expectations once all quarantines are lifted, and the working world is expected to be operational in full swing. The insight is aimed at gaining knowledge into what actually happened to the new virtual working class as the pandemic unfolded as reported from their primary point of view. The feedback may prove essential for the new future norm and possibly shape it.

Literature review

The “teleworking” pandemic

Initial research interest in teleworking, or the notion of working remotely, was fueled during the 1970s, when the expression “working from home” was used to connote the term distant working from the workplace, fundamentally by methods of technological communications, as a substitute for physical traveling (Nilles *et al.*, 1976). By the 1980s, teleworking was being portrayed as the “next working environment revolution” (Kelly, 1985), and enthusiasm for teleworking has kept on developing among workers, managers, organizations, networks, the media communications industry and others (Handy and Mokhtarian, 1996). One of the latest definitions of teleworking is that of Moon and Stanworth (1997) who perceive the complex nature of teleworking by characterizing it as “a form of “flexible” work which involves distance work, remote work or telecommuting which is dependent upon the use of information and communication technologies” (pp. 338–339) and has been organized into three categories by Andriessen (1991), Gray *et al.* (1993), and Huws (1994):

- (1) *Home-based telework*: high-skilled or low-skilled work obligations are completed at home through virtual means. This may include various forms of communication such as computers, telephones and other digital devices.
- (2) *Teleworking from remote offices*: work is done at workplaces that are far from the primary office such as at “satellite workplaces” (which is controlled by the owner); at telecentres (information technology and work space is accommodated for a given group, and managers are approached to rent space for their workers) or at telecottages (where training is accommodated for clients, and attempts are made to attract recruitment for independently employed telecommuters).
- (3) *Mobile telework*: completed by individuals who now and again work away from their ordinary working base (either a customary office, a satellite office or at home) and whose work usually includes travel as well as investing time in clients’ premises.

Therefore, teleworking is a procedure that includes a heap of practices and definitions which utilize more than one type of system and is best thought of as a multidimensional phenomenon wherein its character varies along utilization, knowledge intensity, intraorganizational contact, extraorganizational contact and location (Olsen, 1989; Gray *et al.*, 1993; Gillespie *et al.*, 1995).

Advantages of telework for companies

As mentioned earlier, telework is characterized as work that is performed from various locations that empowers employees to access their work activities by utilization Information and Communication Technology (ICT) (Perez-Perez *et al.*, 2003). It has been considered an elective method of sorting out tasks. By offering the likelihood to work anyplace and whenever, telework has attracted the courtesy of both academics and professionals. It has been viewed as a win-win situation for employees and organizations, making it conceivable to choose from various abilities to reduce costs, to motivate workers and create work-life balance (Madsen, 2003). Past research studies have uncovered various multifaceted advantages of teleworking for organizations (Perez-Perez *et al.*, 2003) such as

- (1) *Cost saving*: according to Radcliffe (2010), companies could cut back on costs while teleworking. Some examples of such savings include infrastructure, water, electricity, phone and Internet bills, cleaning and security staff costs. In addition, De Graaf and Rietveld (2007) stated that companies could also save on salary costs by having their employees work from home as opposed to employees working from the office.
- (2) *Encourages planning skills*: time-planning skills and autonomy have been shown to be a significant telework advantage in existing literature studies (Morgan, 2004) since increased autonomy increases employee satisfaction (Harpaz, 2002), which in turn leads to higher/better productivity (Morgan, 2004).
- (3) *Reduces employee's turnover*: by allowing employees to work from home, employee satisfaction will likely to increase, resulting in lower turnover and fewer sick days.

Other advantages for companies include increased autonomy (Harpaz, 2002), reduced informal communication (Khalifa and Davison, 2000), improved productivity (Fonner and Roloff, 2010) and increased job satisfaction (Gurstein, 2001).

Advantages of telework for employees

Due to teleworking, employees have noticed several advantages from working remotely, and some of the advantages include the following:

- (1) *Flexibility*: this factor is firmly identified with work autonomy in which an employee can choose the most productive time to start and finish work obligations. Teleworking makes it conceivable to build up a pattern that best suits employee work preferences since teleworkers have more prominent power over their work conditions (Tremblay and Genin, 2007). It can be said that teleworking reduces working environment interruptions, particularly in the event that employees are working alone at home.
- (2) *Increased family time*: the likelihood to remotely work from home on a telework basis empowers employees to combine work with the capacity to manage family-related issues (Johnson *et al.*, 2007) and enables balance between work and family time, thus, making it possible to care for kids and other relatives, which is a significant resource for teleemployees and could lead to positive work results.
- (3) *Possibility to work from home in case of sickness*: having the option to telework in case of sickness can be regarded as a substitute to office presenteeism (Johns, 2010). It is plausible that people who wish to fulfill their work commitments under any conditions might be less stressed due to telework possibility. In this way, this factor

can be considered a significant resource that can build employee satisfaction and productivity.

- (4) *Save on travel expenses*: as teleworkers have reduced driving time to and from home, travel costs are additionally decreased (Tremblay and Genin, 2007). This likelihood to save money on travel costs, such as fuel, can likewise be a factor of increasing employee satisfaction.

Advantages of telework for women

Gender issues in teleworking have been ambiguous, as there is a lack of research in this area. However, teleworking has been valued more by females than males, since it allows women to deal with, invest more energy and spend more time with their kids, which would not be conceivable without it (Hartig *et al.*, 2007). Women have been increasingly motivated by the adaptability, flexibility and increased independence/autonomy when teleworking, on the grounds that teleworking permits them to balance their work and family time (Lim and Teo, 2000). In addition, it could likewise build professional opportunities for ladies (Schreiber, 1999), as they would be able to work from home during sick as well as maternity leaves. Furthermore, it encourages men to become more associated with family issues, which may eliminate the current segregation roles between genders.

Limitations of telework

As with everything else, there is always a disadvantage in using any resource, and telework is not an exception. Some of the limitations that are associated with teleworking include the following:

- (1) *Professional isolation*: employees who are working remotely might feel professionally isolated as they do not know what is happening in their organizations and, not to mention, might have little-to-no contact with their colleagues and hence feel left out (Bailey and Kurland, 2002). In addition, a lack of communication could also decrease organizational identification among teleworkers (Ammons and Markham, 2004).
- (2) *Manager–employee relationship*: when workers shift from working at the office to teleworking, it unavoidably changes the recurrence and nature of communications they once had with their managers and colleagues. Consequently, teleworking decreases face-to-face communications, which might affect getting prompt feedback on assignments from managers, and hence, could possibly and negatively affect the nature of the manager–employee relationship (Gajendran and Harrison, 2007).
- (3) *Employee–employee relationship*: coordination, adaptability and workload among colleagues will unquestionably change as employees begin to telework. Other changes include lack of feedback, friendship and communication between employees (Fonner and Roloff, 2010). Teleworkers who depend on other employees during teamwork may encounter time pressure and might demonstrate a reduced level of individual productivity due to working in different locations.

However, even with the existing advantages and limitations of teleworking, it is important to investigate and acknowledge employees' emotional concerns with regards to shifting online. Understanding how telework impacts employees' emotional well-being is essential, especially during the pandemic, as it is one step closer in understanding how such choices affect employee performance.

Emotional/psychological contract

In 1960, Argyris first introduced the notion of psychological contract, which was later modified by Rousseau (1989) in concluding that it is an employee's concept of shared commitments between themselves and organizations (Rousseau, 1989; Rousseau and Tijoriwala, 1998). This notion depends on the observation that an organization is committed to fulfill their promises, such as paying compensations, in return for employees' performance as far as responsibilities, capacities, information sharing, etc. (Rousseau and Tijoriwala, 1998). It includes numerous vague commitments that cannot be explicitly addressed, as it is a social exchange relationship (Aggarwal, 2014). To better understand the role of the psychological contract, Guest's and Conway's (1997) model of the psychological contract best depicts how workers' responsibilities and performance are identified within the contract. The substance of the model is connected to three components – fairness, trust and the delivery of the deal. Fairness is connected to multiple variables like how organizations value workers and compensate them for their commitment (Flood *et al.*, 2001). Second, trust is identified with the confidence and certainty of an organization in their workers and their performance. Finally, the delivery of the deal is identified with the satisfaction of the contract (Guest, 1998). Continuously, performance is connected to the attitudinal and behavioral outcome of the model in which positive psychological contract approaches positive outcomes and vice-versa, as appeared in Figure 1 below.

Over time, a psychological contract may change when the agreement is penetrated or unfulfilled. Following a breach of agreement, injustice and unethical processes may happen, since the consequence of the breach significantly affects individuals, groups and organizations (Ahmed and Muchiri, 2013). For example, Robinson and Rousseau (1994) uncovered that around 55% of workers claimed that their psychological contract had been penetrated by their organizations. A portion of the violated terms included the promise of higher compensations, job security, promotional openings, etc.; this, in turn, increased employees' feelings of deception and bad behavior as well as affected their relationship with the organizations. Subsequently, negative perspectives and responses rose because of procedural and interactional injustice, as found in Figure 2 below.

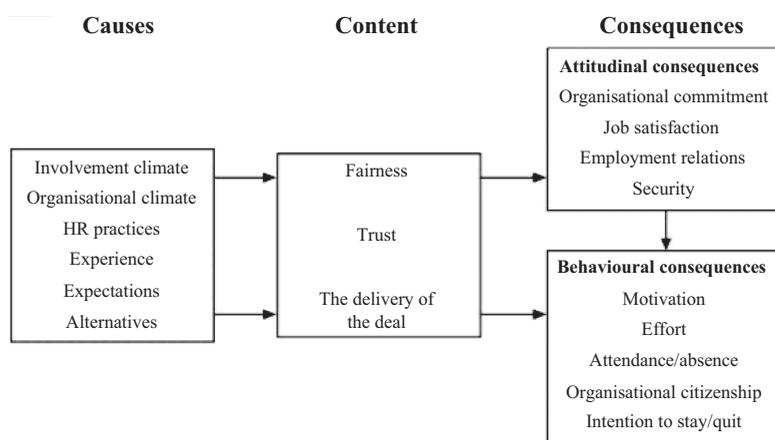


Figure 1.
Guest's and Conway's
model of the
psychological contract

Source(s): Guest and Conway, 1997, p. 6, Fig.1

That said, due to the new working conditions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, some employees may feel that their psychological contract may have been breached involuntarily. Therefore, elements that pertain to these matters, like company communication and assurances, should be monitored and observed as the workplace changes unfold. In addition to monitoring such changes, organizations should also address ways in which they could monitor, assess and increase employees' productivity during teleworking conditions in order to ensure desired results.

Employee productivity measures

In general, organizational culture can have either a positive or a negative effect on motivation and performance. [Yildirim et al. \(2016\)](#) found that positive culture increased employee performance and commitment. An effective culture urges employees to do their tasks with vitality and energy. Therefore, it can be concluded that organizational culture is positively correlated to job satisfaction, commitment and performance. Some organizational factors that could increase employees' productivity include the following:

- (1) *Motivation*: in recent years, many organizations realized that it is important to focus on activities that inspire their employees in order to accomplish organizational goals. This is due to the fact that motivation increases job involvement by making the work increasingly important and interesting in addition to improving worker productivity and performance ([Kamery, 2004](#); [Ekerman, 2006](#)).
- (2) *Communication*: with successful communication, an organization can have great coordination among their teams or units, whereby its absence will reflect issues in running business tasks or fundamentally cause harm/conflict between workers.
- (3) *Job stress*: work pressure is delivered when one cannot organize accessible resources and job requests with individual capacities. In other words, some organizations may request accomplishing a certain degree of work, while their employees might not be able to adapt to the given errands. It is said that the demands surpass the limit of a person, which in turn neglects to satisfy top administrations. In addition, work pressure has been referred as a social issue ([Mizuno et al., 2006](#)) that has a blend of elements that interrupts workers' physical and mental abilities and influences their health care ([Conway et al., 2008](#)).

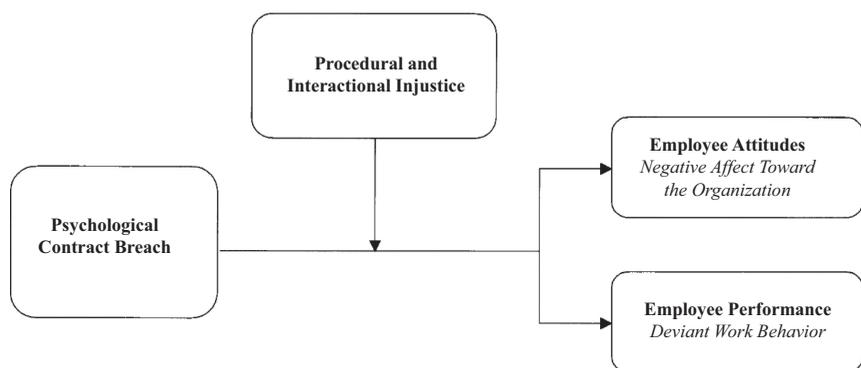


Figure 2.
Psychological contract breach

Source(s): Kickul, 2001, p. 90, Fig. 1

Other methods which companies could implement to increase employees' productivity include implementing a four-day workweek, which is not a new concept. France, for example, executed a decrease in working hours nearly 20 years back as a way of bettering the work-life balance for the country. Furthermore, Canada, the Netherlands and New Zealand experimented with the idea of a four-day workweek and witnessed successful outcomes. In fact, they are working toward making these changes permanent. Moreover, when UK business pioneers authorized a four-day of work for some of their full-time representatives, they witnessed that employees' satisfaction was enhanced. They also witnessed an increase in staff efficiency/productivity and lower turnover (Laker and Roulet, 2019). Unmistakably, there is a connection between the four-day workweek and better personal satisfaction (Laker and Roulet, 2019). However, the notion is not yet universally accepted or adhered to as the needs of individual institutes must be considered and studied further. Yet, due to its reported success, a shorter workweek may prove to be successful, especially given the lockdown and social distancing measures of the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Employee personal assessment

Since the degree of organizational success relies upon the performance of human resources, several studies explained different methods in evaluating employee performance (Wong and Wong, 2007). Some of the methods include the following:

- (1) *Performance appraisal*: Performance appraisal is known to help and improve the effectiveness of employees since it points out to employee's development needs and future execution in the organization. For example, it helps employees to get feedback on how well they are achieving certain assignments and what skills are needed to improve their adequacy. Besides, it allows managers to coordinate and match employees with the right assignments, which reduces pressure, dissatisfaction and time wasting among workers.
- (2) *Promotion*: organizational promotion policies and procedures play a major role in employee satisfaction. Some organizations have a strategy of internal advancement, while others like to enlist new workers to vacant positions. Effective organizations reward their employees with advancements and promotions, since appreciation and compensation from the board motivate employees to increase their accomplishments and, along these lines, increase their efficiency/productivity.
- (3) *Training and development*: training and development serve to improve employee confidence and may improve their general attitude toward the organization. For instance, training encourages employees to exercise their skills to a better standard, thus increasing performance and helping them to progress in the workplace. Saleem *et al.* (2011) exposed several advantages of training and development, such as a tool to improve human capital, upgrade skills, expand employee knowledge and competence, reduce absenteeism and much more.

Employee job satisfaction

There is plenty of literature concerning job satisfaction that includes single and multi-item surveys. The latter are often split into sub-sections or domains, while others view it as a multidimensional measure or intrinsic and extrinsic components. For the sake of argument, each of them claims superiority to the other instruments. Some of the most popular ones among these are the following: Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) (Weiss *et al.*, 1977), Job Descriptive Index (JDI) (Smith *et al.*, 1969), Job in General Scale (JIG) (Ironson *et al.*, 1989), Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) (Spector, 1997), Warr Job Satisfaction Questionnaire

(WJSQ) (Warr, 1990) and Measure of Job Satisfaction (MJS) (Traynor and Wade, 1993). Some of the original versions proved too lengthy for routine surveys. For example, the proprietors of MSQ (Weiss *et al.*, 1977) developed a 20-item “short form” as an alternative to their original 100-item “long form”. Moreover, the developers of the JDI (Smith *et al.*, 1969) developed an “abridged” 25-item version (AJDI), marketed in the same package with the original 72-item JDI. In both cases, the short version demonstrated psychometric power comparable to the long version. Neither has been deemed a better indicator than the other.

In this research, the developed frameworks and questions from the mentioned available job satisfaction surveys are employees. The questions were split into three domains – job satisfaction, job efficiency and job expectation – of conditions before the COVID-19 pandemic in comparison to working conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research objectives

The ultimate objective of this paper is to determine if emergency measures to continue working from home, whether preestablished or as an abrupt response to the current corona crisis, can be conducted successfully in comparison to the elements and expectations of the conventional workplace. Reported from a first point of view (the employee), the feedback expected also includes expectations of a possible new work norm once all quarantines are lifted. Moreover, the general sentiments of employees toward emotional issues and distress will provide an overall picture of how the pandemic has impacted them in that element, and how in turn, that has impacted their efficiency and productivity. This research hopes to gain insight into the following:

- (1) Comparing the efficiency of current work situation of working from home to the precorona conditions of working onsite;
- (2) Exploring the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on conventional work expectations;
- (3) Gaining feedback as to what employees expect from their workplace after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research questions

The research questions used for this study revolve around the experience of employees as reported from their point of view. They question the impact of working from home on various elements and work expectations. In that, the aim is to answer the following questions:

- (1) How do employees feel about their prepandemic work duties and expectations?
- (2) To what degree does working from home affect conventional work duties and expectations?
- (3) What are the general sentiments of virtual front-line workers regarding their company’s reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic?
- (4) What changes are they hoping for and/or expecting after the pandemic?

Methodology

Research design

This study employs a primary quantitative approach as it is descriptive in nature and uses a closed-answer survey. Data collection was conducted using a structured method of gathering feedback from participants through a self-administered survey from three industries – banking and finance, education and training and oil and gas companies, primarily due to

the nature of the work which allows for remote working conditions. This data-oriented approach is best described as a causal comparative in that it aims to find an impact of an element on a group or a factor for comparison. Also called the quasiexperimental research, this quantitative research method is used by researchers to conclude cause–effect equation between two or more variables, where one variable is dependent on another independent variable (Chiang *et al.*, 2015).

Questionnaire development

Although this research is primarily qualified as a quantitative one, it also arguably had an underlying qualitative element as well. The development of the research instrument, the survey, uses the logic of a restricted phenomenological approach in order to serve its purpose of gaining feedback from a first-person point of view. This selected approach is meant to elucidate the experience as lived by a group of people. Patton (2001) notes that a phenomenological study is one that focuses on the description of what people are doing and how they experience what they experience. One key element of the phenomenological approach is that it assumes there is an essence to a shared experience. Furthermore, Eichelberger (1989) asserts that in a phenomenological study, there is a need to conduct an analysis of the experience so that the basic elements of the experience that are common to members of a specific group can be identified.

Thus, due to the lockdown circumstances, the survey used a phenomenological approach to help to design the closed-ended questions, in that a group of family and friends were interviewed face to face in order to objectify what they were experiencing. A phenomenological study usually expects the researcher to derive meaningful research questions that relate to the lived experience of the individual (Creswell, 1998). In order to conduct this, Creswell (1998) states that it must be done through face-to-face interviews with individuals who have experienced the phenomenon. However, from a more liberal research perspective, in her research on whether remote surveys can be categorized as part of a qualitative phenomenological study, Sweet (2002) argues that remote interviewing is a methodologically and economically valuable data collection technique in qualitative research. She further argues that qualitative researchers should not rely exclusively on the face-to-face interview, as remote meetings like telephone interviews can be an equally valuable data collection approach. Using this logic, and given the COVID-19 pandemic situation of imposed lockdowns, meetings were done virtually one on one with close family and friends who are living the experience of working from home. Finally, a viable closed-ended quantitative survey was administered following the phenom study due to the pandemic restrictions.

Survey design

The self-administered online questionnaire consisted of eight questions consisting of three types: dichotomous (“Yes/No”) questions, Likert-type scale questions and multiple choice questions. The survey was designed in two languages, English and Arabic, to increase the number of participants and also to reduce language barriers as most locals speak English as a second language. The questions derived for this study were organized categorically to able to compare the preCOVID-19 experience given the mentioned variables (employees and workplace expectations) and current experience given the independent variable (COVID-19 pandemic). In order to address the research objectives, the questions belonged to one of three categories as follows:

- (1) OWC – Old Working Conditions (preCOVID-19);
- (2) CWC– Current Working Conditions (during COVID-19);
- (3) CRP – Company Response in Pandemic (during COVID-19);

(4) FWE – Future Work Expectations (postCOVID-19).

Furthermore, the survey questions are broken down into domains, with questions inspired by the literature review and from past literature surveys. Each question is listed in [Table 1](#) in relation to the mentioned elements:

The survey was distributed to participants via virtual methods available – email and phone application. Willing participants, who fit the criterion mentioned in [Table 2](#), were able to complete the survey remotely. The survey results were gathered and analyzed using an online program.

Sampling technique

Participants were selected using purposeful sampling, which is a recommended approach in research aiming to report quantitative data. [Patton \(2001\)](#) asserts that the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study. In this study, we focus on individuals who are experiencing virtual working conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic. This nonprobability sampling method is also most suitable given the current lockdown effects of the pandemic, which limit the options for data collection. In order to ensure balances, we monitored the results in an attempt to keep the quotas of the job sector and gender in balance. Tracking the respondents and nonrespondents proved essential to provide a fair representation. Also, a snowball technique was used in that we asked our contacts to forward the survey to their colleagues and family members who qualify to take

Question number	Category	Actual question	Domain
Question 1	OWC	When asked about how they felt regarding the conventional preCOVID-19 working conditions	Job satisfaction
Question 2	CWC	When asked to compare the efficiency of working from the office preCOVID-19 to their current situation of working from home	Job efficiency
Question 3	CWC	When asked how they felt in general about their current remote working conditions	Job efficiency
Question 4	CWC	When asked to what extent the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the different elements of their work expectations	Job expectation
Question 5	CRP	When asked about how their company reacted to the COVID-19 crisis and what they thought about it	Job expectation
Question 6	CWC	When asked how much of their workload they feel can be accomplished if their company decides to conduct all their work virtually postCOVID-19 pandemic	Job efficiency
Question 7	FEW	When asked how much of their workload they feel can be accomplished if their company decided to work partly virtually and partly onsite (hybrid model)	Job efficiency
Question 8	FEW	When asked about the changes they are expecting regarding their workplace/working conditions postCOVID-19 pandemic	Job expectation

Table 1.
Survey questions by category vs. domain

	Total participants
Banking and finance	61
Education and training	68
Oil and gas	63
Total participants	192

Table 2.
Participants by sector

the survey. Our aim was to gather at least 50 respondents from each of three sectors – banking and finance, education and training and oil and gas – for a total sample size of 150 participants.

Participants

The survey originally aimed to have 150 participants, but the final sample of 192 participants was primarily due to the snowball sampling technique, which encouraged individuals to forward the e-survey to their colleagues who fit the criteria. Below is a breakdown of the total respondents:

Data analysis and findings

The raw data were used to generate descriptive analysis and draw conclusions to the arguments of the research questions. Each question is depicted below along with its finding and interpretation.

Q1. When asked about their sentiments regarding conventional preCOVID-19 working conditions:

Findings: It is obvious that most people thought that the typical eight to nine hours working day is too long and that the typical working week is too much. They also thought that conventional working hours can be minimized and that most of their meetings could easily be converted to email. In conclusion, one can safely assume that preCOVID-19 conditions should be reviewed as witnessed in [Table 3](#).

Q2. When asked to compare the efficiency of working from the office preCOVID-19 to their current situation of working from home:

Findings: The majority of people felt that they are more productive at home than at the workplace, as well as being able to concentrate more at home than in the office. This can be explained by being more comfortable in a home setting and having less distractions in way of work demands, as shown in [Table 4](#). There was almost an even split in when it came to getting their work done in less time at home, as 51% reported in agreement and 49% said they

	Agree	Disagree
The typical eight to nine hours working day is too long, and I can achieve my workload in less time	85%	15%
The five to six days work week is too much	74%	26%
In-office working hours should be minimized	83%	17%
Most of our meetings could easily be turned into emails	76%	24%

Table 3.
PWC employee
sentiments on
preCOVID-19 work
conditions

	Agree	Disagree
I feel that I am more productive working from home than working at my workplace	56%	44%
I feel that I am able to concentrate more while working at home than while working at my workplace	57%	43%
I feel that I get my work done in less time while working from home than I would at my workplace	51%	49%
I have been able to find a comfortable place in my home to conduct my work	69%	31%
I feel that I am more resourceful working from home than I am working onsite	45%	55%

Table 4.
CWC – individual
efficiency of telework
vs working on-site

were unable to. This can be explained as to the nature of working from home, in that employees can chose their own working hours which can span throughout the day. Most respondents reported being able to find a comfortable place at home to get the job done, while the majority found themselves less resourceful at home. This could be explained by the lack of communication between colleagues who can serve as an information source or the disruption to face-to-face interaction which are needed for pending issues.

Q3. When asked how they felt in general about their current remote working conditions:

Findings: Most respondents agreed that they enjoyed the flexibility of setting their own working hours, as well as being more productive due to the flexible hours, as demonstrated in Table 5. This can be explained that people can work at their leisure and dedicate the most appropriate time for them to get work done, especially those who may have experienced additional family needs due to the lockdown. The majority are fine with showing their faces while on a live meeting, which is a relevant question from a Middle East context as some women may not be socially comfortable with it. The majority also reported a positive attitude regarding not having to undergo the time-consuming commute from their home to the office, and that they enjoyed the extra time they get to spend with their families.

Q4. When asked to what extent the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the different elements of their work expectations:

Findings: The majority of the respondents reported that their ability to conduct meeting effectively is more or less the same or better. This can be explained by the need for more documentation prior to virtual meetings making them more efficient as the objectives are clear. Also, the less opportunity for small talk and other interruptions may explain this as well. Moreover, the ability to meet deadlines seems to be the most affected positively, as this can be explained by employees having the luxury of deciding their own hours when they feel most productive. Also, the ability to make decisions was more or less the same or affected positively, as reported by 67% of respondents shown in Table 6. As for the ability to share

Table 5.
CWC – general
employee sentiments
on remote working
conditions

	Agree	Disagree
I enjoy the flexibility of deciding my own working hours	86%	14%
I am more productive with flexible working hours	79%	21%
I am comfortable with live meetings which expect me to show my face	68%	32%
I enjoy not having to commute to/from work	74%	26%
I am enjoying spending more quality time with my family (or myself)	89%	11%

Table 6.
CWC – impact of
working remotely on
conventional work
elements

	Greatly affected positively	Affected positively	It is the same	Affected negatively	Greatly affected negatively
Ability to conduct meetings effectively	18%	26%	32%	14%	11%
Ability to meet deadlines	21%	18%	39%	14%	8%
Ability to take decisions	17%	20%	47%	12%	5%
Ability to share work content/information with colleagues	15%	15%	41%	23%	6%
Team cohesion and efficiency	12%	20%	36%	27%	5%

work, most people reported it being the same or affected negatively. This can be explained by the lack of social interaction and immediate availability of decision makers in comparison to an office setting. Finally, team cohesion seems to be split as 32% of respondents deemed it affected positively or highly positively, while 32% deemed it affected negatively or highly negatively, while 36% reported it being the same, as shown in [Table 6](#). This could possibly be explained by the influence of the already-existing team dynamic before the pandemic, as well as limited physical interaction.

Q5. When asked about how their company reacted to COVID-19 and what they thought about it:

Findings: As more than 70% of all respondents agreed to most statements, it is safe to assume that they were satisfied with their company's immediate response to the COVID-19 remote working conditions. However, more than 60% of the respondents reported that their company did not have a standard contingency plan in place for an emergency situation, as viewed in [Table 7](#). It is then suggested that companies should look into more elaborate contingency planning in case of any future pandemics or national emergencies. Also, the majority of the respondents reported positive sentiments regarding the way the company handled the pandemic in terms of reassurance, communication and supporting decisions in the employees' best interest. These elements are crucial as they can impact employee satisfaction and psychological contract as mentioned previously.

Q6. When asked how much of their workload they feel can be accomplished if their company decides to conduct all their work virtually postCOVID-19 pandemic:

Findings: More than 70% of employees currently working from home reported that they can accomplish at least 60–70% of the expected workload, as demonstrated in [Table 8](#). This implies that remote work could be purposeful and efficient in most aspects of the expected workload. Thus, organizations could further adapt to the pandemic with reviewed expectations, policies and procedures to increase the rate of efficiency.

	Agree	Disagree
I felt that my workplace had my best interest in mind during this pandemic	80%	20%
I felt that my workplace provided enough support for me to get the job done	82%	18%
I felt confident that my workplace would pay my salary in full	82%	18%
My workplace already had a contingency plan in case of emergencies like this	38%	62%
Management communicated effectively during this time	70%	30%
My workplace reassured me that they will do their best to keep my position/job	83%	17%
My workplace kept me motivated and inquired about my overall well-being	75%	25%
I am confident that my company will take proper health and social distancing measures once we are required to be back in the office	79%	21%

Table 7.
Company reaction to
COVID-19

Less than 50% of workload	11%
50–60% of workload	15%
60–70% of workload	24%
70–80% of workload	17%
80–90% of workload	18%
100% of workload	15%

Table 8.
Percentage of
workload efficiently
done remotely (only
remote work option)

Q7. When asked how much of their workload they feel can be accomplished if their company decided to work partly virtually and partly onsite (hybrid model):

Findings: More than half of the respondents indicated that they can achieve at least 80–90% of the currently expected workload if a hybrid model of onsite and at-home work is established, as shown in [Table 9](#). This implies that, with proper review of conventional workload expectations and appropriate conditions, employees could very well be able achieve complete efficiency when remote work is involved.

Q8. When asked about the changes they are expecting regarding their workplace/working conditions postCOVID-19 pandemic (allowed to choose more than one response):

Findings: Only 36% are expecting things to go back to normal (preCOVID-19 conditions) while less supported the notion of giving employees an option to completely work from home, as shown in [Table 10](#). Also, more than half of the respondents supported the idea of a hybrid model, as indicated in [Table 10](#). Given that the conditions at home may be more favorable for the employees and that the conditions on-site may be more favorable for the company, perhaps more satisfaction can be achieved if employees could spend less time at their office yet still achieve their expected workload. Favoring a hybrid option could also be due to the increased family obligations which came along with the pandemic. Surprisingly, only 24% of the respondents felt that the conventional five-day working week should be made into only four days. The preference could be due to the fact that remote work naturally comes along with much environmental stimulus, especially under lockdown conditions. Lastly, 38% of respondents supported the notion of more flexible working hours after the pandemic. This could mean that the majority of employees are satisfied with the mentioned preCOVID-19 conditions, yet feel they can be just as affective with a hybrid model as supported in the findings of [Table 10](#). Preference for flexibility in working hours can further be explained due to the lockdown circumstances which may include more family responsibilities.

Conclusion and contribution

In conclusion, it was found that most employees agreed that OWC need to be reviewed, and that the general sentiment was almost equally split on the efficiency of CWC in comparison to OWC, yet the majority was enjoying the flexible conditions. Moreover, the majority of respondents found that overall conventional work elements either remained the same or had been impacted positively rather than negatively. Also, if given an option of a hybrid model

Table 9.
Percentage of
workload efficiently
done remotely (hybrid
option of on-site and
remotely)

Less than 50% of workload	6%
50–60% of workload	15%
60–70% of workload	9%
70–80% of workload	17%
80–90% of workload	22%
100% of workload	31%

Table 10.
PostCOVID-19 work
expectations

Expect everyone to go back to their work site (business as usual)	36%
Give them an option of working completely remotely (if possible/proven successful during pandemic)	30%
Give employees an option of working partly on-site and partly remotely (hybrid model)	53%
Make a four-day work week instead of the conventional five days	24%
Allow more flexible working hours (even if it means you must work more hours)	38%

inclusive of partly working remotely and partly working onsite, a considerable majority reported that they are able to efficiently conduct at least 80% of their work expectation. Finally, it was found that employee expectation is changing as they consider postCOVID-19 conditions. In terms of the initial research questions and objectives mentioned in this study, the questions can be answered as follows based on the findings:

- (1) Conventional working conditions, when compared before and after the pandemic, have changed in numerous ways. Some elements seem to have been impacted positively while others seem to have been impacted negatively.
- (2) Conventional work expectations, like working hours and number of working days, have been reported as unnecessarily exaggerated and do not necessarily influence productivity.
- (3) The majority reported positive sentiments regarding the way their company handled the crisis in terms of communication and motivation.
- (4) The majority of respondents are hoping for changes to the conventional work expectations postCOVID-19 pandemic.

In conclusion, it is advised that companies reexamine their conventional work policies and expectations so as to better adapt to the new and emerging reality of telework. In doing so, they can impact society at large by allowing for more desirable working conditions, especially during a pandemic. These findings provide a contribution to society in general as they provide evidence that changes are happening, and they are impacting more than one element of the conventional work expectations, in some cases positively.

Research limitations

As with most research investigations undertaken, there is surely something which can be improved. This research was conducted using virtual crowd-sourcing methods to administer the survey and may have been enhanced should other methods have been integrated for data gathering. Also, a more comprehensive phenomenological approach could have been incorporated to add a qualitative method to the investigation. This could have freed the results of answer limitation and experience bias. Moreover, it is good practice to involve both quantitative and qualitative elements to any research when possible. Finally, future research can benefit from a bigger pool of participants so as to gain a clearer picture.

Word to policy makers and researchers

Policy making. In our effort to contribute to the greater good of this world, we hope that policy makers make use of the findings of this research to make positive changes in their community of stakeholders. The long-term effects of creating a multi-layered approach to conventional work settings can pave the way to more opportunities being created to those in need of more flexibility in work-related matters. We hope that the findings will inspire others to investigate similar matters and become a driving force for policy review and amendments toward sustainable workplace solutions.

Future research. This research contributes to science in both a conventional and innovative way. First, it is conventional that it gives the feedback of the current experience from the undertakers, as they experience it and sheds some much-needed light on their success and trials. This is important to managers so as to provide synergetic remote environments which harbor efficiency. Second, in a pandemic such as the one imposed by COVID-19, it is essential to integrate the often-overlooked emotional and social welfare of the employees as it may impact their efficiency and/or productivity. Employers are encouraged

to investigate these matters which may also lead to more productive and loyal employees. However, discussions and further research on monitoring methods are also important in order to ensure desired results. As more emphasis is put on telework and its expectations, it is important for policy makers to reassess their conventional ways and give empathy and importance to matters other than physical presence. Employers can also benefit from primary feedback from employees in order to deliver more favorable teleworking conditions. Using such insightful information can also lead to a positive impact on job satisfaction and sustainability. Investigating other demographics, like gender, can also prove advantages to researchers and employers alike in order to give a more precise assessment.

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