REMOTE WORKING: A TREND OR A MUST?

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The study of remote working’s impact on the superior-subordinate relationship reveals that it is necessary to create a new model of the modern workplace. Considering the current worldwide pandemic caused by the COVID-19 disease, the need for remote work has become even more crucial for the continued existence of companies. We conducted our research on Lebanese SMEs because of how they have evolved over the last several years considering local realities. The researchers used a method other than random sampling while studying 420 remote professionals. Most employees (70%) gave their complete and honest answers. The poll included respondents from various small and medium enterprises. However, 83% of the respondents were women and 17% were men. Respondents’ personal information was not taken into account and their responses were kept anonymous. SPSS was used to analyze the collected data and generate results. Employees highly appreciate the support they receive from their line managers and top management, which ties all three of these beliefs together. The impact of the global pandemic on the Lebanese economy and workforce is being felt by everyone, from CEOs and managers to employees. It is during these times that attention shifts to workers who would perform better if they were acquainted with the requirements at their workplace.

Keywords: remote work; commitment; job satisfaction; job performance; COVID-19

Introduction

Our study of the impact of remote work on the superior-subordinate relationship reveals that it is necessary to create a new model of the modern workplace. Anderson & Kelliher (2020) claim that the rapid development of connection and communication technologies has also become a major factor in the efficiency of remote work, as the concept of being physically present in the workplace has become secondary or even obsolete depending on the type of work in question.

Considering the current worldwide pandemic caused by the COVID-19 disease, the need for remote work has become even more crucial for the continued existence of companies. By some means, the public was confronted with a change that was imposed on them, and as a result, businesses were obliged to adapt in order to maintain their position and overall expected profit, according to Blix et al (2021).
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Remote work, however, may have certain drawbacks, such as feelings of isolation from the professional environment, a devaluation of the relationship between workers and their supervisors, as well as between workers according to Shatila & Alozian (2019). There will be a gradual return to the pre-pandemic status quo for businesses and procedures according to Ushakov & Shatila (2021).

There will be long-term repercussions even after the outbreak has subsided. It is the processes within a company that relate to how tasks are delegated by managers to employees, moving from a top-down to an interdependence between managers and employees, and the sharing of responsibilities rather than the strict delegation that existed before the pandemic, according to Foss (2020).

Another trend that is likely to persist after the pandemic has passed is the change in the structure of work, or the migration to working from home according to Ushakov et al (2021). Employers will be hesitant to return to full-time office employment since many people believe that a hybrid work-life balance is more desirable and more efficient, according to Foss (2020).

Smaller teams (which are easier to organize from a distance) and a greater reliance on management based on individual objectives and incentives are all possible outcomes of remote work (Raven et al., 2010).

Purpose of the study

To deal with these challenges, we need to investigate how remote work affects the quality of the leader-member exchange (LMX) while maintaining a functional link that supports the overall work environment. Because no one likes changes, it is common for it to be faced with resistance in the workplace.

Since last year, this change has become mandatory, not voluntary. People around the world have been forced to adjust their customary habits of living and working due to the shockwaves of pandemic.

In fact, in the current pandemic situation, managing people and how this condition has affected their thinking and ability to organize their tasks and work as a team, focus on the organizational culture while following the procedures already in place, as well as technology, allowing them to find the right tools to use and adapt to this new work environment have been the biggest challenges.

Significance of the study

There will be a greater understanding of how to adapt to virtual work while still maintaining high standards for employee commitments and performance in their positions as the primary consequence of this inquiry. Using this dynamic in the right way might be beneficial to the company's employees as well as its owners.

Because of the outbreak of COVID-19 and the country's overall economic decline, this study comes at a perfect time for Lebanon, which is now through a new working mode. Apart from that, the instability brought on by the uprising, demonstrations in different regions of Lebanon and the COVID-19 epidemic have all contributed to a general deterioration of the situation, resulting in a feeling of general fear that has affected corporate activity in Lebanon.
Health care in Lebanon is already overwhelmed, trying to meet the needs of the country's large native population, as well as an enormous number of refugees, which is the world’s largest per capita. During the lockdown, many people stopped going to the hospital for non-essential treatment as the government resources were focused on fighting the pandemic. Even before the outbreak, the country's economy was already in turmoil.

High public debt, a shortage of foreign money in a country dependent on imports, and political turmoil after the October 17 protests have all contributed to Lebanon's current economic crisis.

Because of the lockdown requirement, many small and medium-sized businesses were forced to close their doors due to rising unemployment. When most companies were forced to close due to the lockdown, many people resorted to regular employment to feed and clothe their families.

When the lockdown was in effect, all educational institutions were forced to close their doors. When several educational institutions started experimenting with online learning, there were many concerns about students’ access to the materials they needed to complete their studies. The students faced a variety of difficulties, including excessive home noise, a lack of adequate study space, and a lack of consistent electricity (a long-standing problem in Lebanon) (Nassar, 2021).

**Leader Member Exchange Theory (LMX)**

According to Day & Miscenko (2016), the LMX idea has been around since the 1970s. It may be concluded that the leader-member exchange concept gained widespread acceptance in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Because of these findings, the LMX concept has become more popular during the last two decades. The integration of LMX theory has been used in processes including trust building, attribution theory, social network perspectives, non-linear effects, and employee opinion over the past two decades (Day & Miscenko 2016).

According to a recent research, the LMX theory's mediation improves job satisfaction, job performance, and organizational commitment. Their research also shows that leaders need to pay attention to and maintain strong ties with their members and other employees of the organization according to Vahidipour & Gheitani (2016). To have a healthy working relationship, the leader and members of an organization must have mutual trust, which may be built using the LMX hypothesis. A good relationship is characterized by trust, reliability, intimacy, and a strong sense of self-awareness.

**Relationship between virtual work and organizational commitment**

Our fundamental hypothesis is that the degree of virtual work (independent variable) will have a direct impact on organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and performance at the workplace after examining the existing state of things in the country (dependent variables). These are the three most important hypotheses:

When it comes to an employee's mental well-being, isolation can be harmful, but it can also strengthen the employee's commitment and loyalty to their company, as they may perceive it as a more cost-effective way to work and spend less time on social activities at the workplace (Wang et al., 2020).

Choo et al (2020) also exam how committed remote employees are to their organizations. A positive correlation was established between remote work and
organizational commitment in their research. Allowing employees to work from home rather than in the office has led to higher levels of commitment within the firm (Choo et al., 2016). Choo et al. (2020) stated that high-quality LMX contacts increase organizational commitment for those who spend most of their time working virtually. According to Kiburz (2016) in comparison to individuals who do just a small amount of virtual work, people with low LMX ties are less likely to be committed to the company.

Hypothesis 1. There is a relationship between virtual work and organizational commitment.

Relationship between virtual work and job satisfaction

According to the research conducted by Felstead & Henseke (2017), employee’s happiness is positively correlated with the degree to which they believe they can better control their work environment. It is worth noting that LMX raises feelings of job contentment, and this is facilitated by good relations between employees and their bosses. According to Szyszko (2021), increased levels of trust between remote workers and their managers lead to higher levels of job satisfaction.

When it comes to job satisfaction, individuals who work a lot are more likely to have it than those who work a little. Job satisfaction is less likely to accrue to workers who work largely in virtual form on low quality LMX connections. According to Siddiqui (202), it is all about building trust between the two levels of authority in the workplace.

Hypothesis 2: There is a relationship between virtual work and job satisfaction.

Relationship between virtual work and job performance

According to Bellman & Hubler (2020), the heads of companies and their employees must communicate effectively. In his research, he found a connection between better communication and greater performance in remote work, proving the need of efficient communication in the workplace. According to Toscano & Zappala (2020), the heads of companies and their employees must keep communication open in the face of a growing sense of social isolation as the epidemic spreads. Increased productivity at work may be achieved by improving communication between managers and their subordinates. Employees who talked to their managers more often were more productive. More frequent use of the virtual work environment is projected to have a positive impact on employees' performance because of the freedom and flexibility it offers, as well as their sense of duty and reciprocity in return for the advantages gained from using a virtual work environment.

Hypothesis 3. There is a relationship between virtual work and job performance.

Data Collection

Ultimately, we want to know how working in a virtual environment affects the relationships between managers and their direct reports, as well as how these relations affect important work outcomes. To achieve this, we need to collect relevant data.

As the popularity of remote work grows, especially among professionals, we thought it would be interesting to investigate the relationship between the amounts of time spent working remotely and factors such as dedication, job satisfaction, and work quality.

Primary data will be gathered using quantitative approaches, which will be supplemented with qualitative archival data and literature reviews on virtual work.
The information received will be relevant in light of the current economic situation in the country and the prevalence of COVID-19.

An international non-profit organization, which employs 420 professionals working to varying degrees in a virtual environment, will conduct a survey to assess the effectiveness of its activities. Our research will include LMX assessments as well as an analysis of the virtual work environment. The result is a quantitative study based on real data.

The fundamental goal of this study's quantitative methodology is to acquire accurate and trustworthy information regarding the link between the Leader Member Exchange Theory and the dependent variables of organizational commitment, work happiness, and job performance.

**Sampling Method**

We conducted our research on Lebanese SMEs because of how they have evolved over the last several years in light of local realities. Researchers utilized a method other than random sampling while studying 420 remote professionals. Most employees (70%) gave their complete and honest answers.

The poll included respondents from different Small-Medium Enterprises. However, 83% of the respondents were female and 17% were male. Respondents' personal information was not given any consideration and their responses were kept anonymous. SPSS was used to analyze the collected data and generate results.

**Regression Analysis One (Virtual Work and Commitment)**

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<th>Model Summary</th>
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*a. Predictors: (Constant), Virtual Work and Organizational Commitment*  

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*a. Dependent Variable: Organizational Commitment*

The regression analysis is an inferential statistic test which aims to study the relationship between based on a margin of error of 5%, the dependent and independent variables. If the P-Value is less than 5%, the null hypothesis is ruled out and the alternative hypothesis is accepted, and vice versa is true in this case.

Additionally, the virtual work variable had P-Value of (0.000), T-Test of (7.077), and Beta value of (0.309).

The following regression equation can be concluded:

\[ Y = A + BX1 \]
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Turnover Average = 0.00 + 0.309 Virtual Work
This means that for every one-unit increase in virtual work, 0.309 units affect the organizational commitment positively.
It can be noted that R squared scored 14.7% of the variance in the dependent variable is explained by which means that 85.3% is unexplained by the model.

Regression Two (Virtual Work and Job Satisfaction)

Table 2 - Regression Analysis Two
(compiled by co-authors)

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<td>Adjusted R Square</td>
<td>Std. Error of the Estimate</td>
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<td>.295</td>
<td>.87128</td>
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<td>a. Predictors: (Constant), Virtual Work and Job Satisfaction</td>
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Coefficients*

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<th>Sig.</th>
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<td>Std. Error</td>
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<td>.195</td>
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<td>7.802</td>
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<tr>
<td>Virtual Work</td>
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<td>.061</td>
<td>.646</td>
<td>10.274</td>
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<td>a. Dependent Variable: Job Satisfaction</td>
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Another regression analysis was conducted between virtual work as independent variable and job satisfaction as a dependent variable. It can be indicated that the virtual work variable scored P-Value of (0.002), T-Test of (10.274), Beta (0.646).
The following regression equation can be concluded:

\[ Y = A + BX_1 \]
Job Satisfaction = 0.00 +0.646 Virtual Work
Job satisfaction rises by 0.646 points for every additional unit of Virtual Work.
R2 scored 39.8 % of the variation in the dependent variable is explained by virtual work, which indicates that 60.2 % of the model's volatility remains unaccounted for.

Regression Three (Virtual Work and Job Performance)

Another regression analysis was conducted between virtual work as independent variable and job performance as a dependent variable. It can be indicated that the workplace fun variable scored P-Value of (0.000), T-Test of (4.700), Beta (0.285).
The following regression equation can be concluded:

\[ Y = A + BX_1 \]
Virtual Work = 0.00 +0.385 Job Performance
The following can be concluded:
Virtual work increases job performance by 28.5 units for every unit increase.
Virtual labor accounts for 8.1% of the variation in the dependent variable, meaning that the model cannot account for 91.9% of the variance.
Table 3 - Regression Analysis Three
(compiled by co-authors)

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a. Predictors: (Constant), Virtual work and Job Performance

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<th>Coefficients*</th>
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<td>Virtual Work</td>
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a. Dependent Variable: Job Performance

Pearson Correlations

Table 4 - Pearson Correlations
(compiled by co-authors)

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<th>Correlations</th>
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<tr>
<td>Virtual Work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
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<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
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<td>N</td>
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Referring to the above Pearson Correlations test, the following results can be interpreted:

The Pearson Coefficient of 0.509 shows that for every percent rise in virtual work, the level of dedication increases by 50.9%.

This suggests that virtual work has a beneficial impact on job performance.

According to the Pearson Coefficient of 0.646, which implies that for every percent rise in virtual work, job satisfaction increases by 64.6%, there is a clear association.

The Pearson Coefficient of 0.532 shows a clear link between virtual work and job performance, meaning that for every percent increase in virtual work, job performance is influenced by 53.2%.

Discussion

The inability to disconnect from work and use the Internet at the same time is one of the most prevalent grievances heard from individuals all over the globe and in every nation. Around the globe, respondents said that online meetings were more challenging, making it more difficult to interact and cooperate with coworkers.

One of the most important advantages of remote work, according to both global and regional respondents, is the reduction in commuting expenses. In both cases, the respondents said that they had more time to organize their day and less time delayed in traffic since they no longer had to go to and from work every day.
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When asked how they might better communicate with their managers, both groups of respondents mentioned managing that they were more efficient in meetings and phone talks and paid more attention to their mental health.

The respondents expected to have more regular interaction with their superiors, as well as a reduction in their total workload, both globally and locally.

Limitations

Remote work presents a number of obstacles for both employees and managers. But the ability to gradually shift from full-time office mode to a more balanced working environment for employees, enhancing their job satisfaction and organizational commitment, is also a benefit.

The employees’ strong preference and general satisfaction with a mixed work mode is reinforced by the high approval level of such a mode both locally and globally. Only those whose jobs need them to be in the office or out in the field choose to work in a mixed mode.

These findings of this survey support the LMX hypothesis that employees' productivity may be increased by improving their mental health connections with their managers and by keeping this in mind when assigning tasks. A study conducted by Neufeld et al (2010) indicated that leaders who communicated more often with their team members performed better as leaders.

While the survey and study of remote work practices globally was conducted using sampling approaches tailored specifically to match the size and demands of the group in question, we discovered some limitations. No matter how many people responded, there would always be a subset of the population that researchers should try to cover in order to acquire a broader scope of data and more accurate results. Despite this, the Middle East as a whole, and Lebanon in particular, is known for its fragile history. However, we were fortunate in that our study was new and important to our country and the rest of the world.

Major findings

Due to the openness of workplaces to this new hybrid mode of operation, the statistics favor remote workers. Tracie distributes grants to non-profit organizations around the world to help those in need and end poverty. There are several groups in Ireland and throughout the world that get these funding.

As a participant in COVID, I found that the rules remained the same, but the objective changed. Even though all activities were monitored and executed through a cloud-based system and digital communication, it was still essential to travel to the field to monitor and conduct operations. It was said that eighty percent of the employees were negatively affected by both the lockdown and the epidemic.

Workers highly appreciate the support they get from their line managers and top management, which ties all three of these beliefs together. A global pandemic's influence on Lebanese economy and workforce is felt by everyone, from CEOs and managers to employees.

It is during these times that attention changes to workers, who would perform better if they were acquainted with the ways of their workplaces.
Practical implications

Some aspects of team management and individual effort should become standard procedures if mixed remote work is to be considered a work style in the future.

We want to find out which approach to remote working is the most successful.

Managers should encourage their teams to conduct computerized risk assessments to ensure that the home office is sufficient and that all employees are familiar with health and safety regulations.

The ability of employees to focus on results rather than activities depends on how clearly each employee understands their expectations and feels confident in their relationships with their coworkers. In the workplace, a lack of faith in teammates can quickly erode morale and production.

Out-of-hours talks should be scheduled exactly as they would be at the office and managers should use video conferencing to stay connected with their employees.

A daily meeting with colleagues is essential for managers and their teams to make sure everyone is taking care of their physical and emotional needs, as well as to discuss any additional assistance they may need to fulfill their duties while working from home.

Setting clear rules on how employees should interact in the workplace is a must for managers. Consequently, anxiety and tension will decrease. Employees should be aware of the benefits of remote work, such as improved health and well-being.

To recuperate and avoid burnout, employees must be able to take time off from work and develop excellent work habits throughout the day.

As a result, supervisors must continually remind their employees of the larger vision and how their work fits into that larger picture. Instead of criticizing an employee for their shortcomings, managers can look for other skills they can share with others to help achieve the team's goals rather than blaming an individual.

There is a danger that people who work remotely will be cold and with no feelings as it is more difficult for them to read body language, tone of voice, and other auditory and visual cues while being in front of a computer screen.

It is crucial to keep these factors in mind whether making negative or positive remarks. Be more attentive and caring to others around you when things become tough.

In the case that an employee is unable to perform a key task on their own, they should be able to delegate it to a colleague. In order to show that they can serve as role models, managers and team leaders should use the strategy of encouraging employees to take some days off.

In addition, coronavirus centers have been set up to assist employees who needed additional knowledge on how to organize and carry out home working. LinkedIn has also developed a remote work course that includes tips from business owners. Work survival kits, HR-inform templates, and health and safety executive guides with frequently asked questions have been developed for those who temporary home employees.

An enormous effort was made over the course of a year to cope with the consequences of the pandemic at the workplace, and all of these activities supported the assumption that a mixed working mode was the optimal practice to adopt in the long run.
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