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TASK PERFORMANCE AND JOB SATISFACTION UNDER THE EFFECT OF REMOTE WORKING: CALL CENTER EVIDENCE**Mustafa Aslan**

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ABSTRACT. The COVID-19 pandemic affected the entire world and caused radical changes in conducting business. During the pandemic, some companies adopted hybrid working, and some requested their employees to work entirely from their homes or workplace. This study is performed to determine the differences in the perceived task performance of employees working from home compared to those operating from their workplace and the possible mediating effect of job satisfaction due to such distinction. The study sample is limited to one call center to prevent the interference of other organizational variables such as management style, human resources practices, organizational culture, and to only call center agents to prevent any interference of the position-related factors. All the call center agents (n=421) participated in this study. The data obtained was examined by a path analysis with the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The results show that the employees who work from home full-time or on certain days of the week have better general task performance perception compared to those who work only from the workplace. The work location has not been found to affect job satisfaction significantly.

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Introduction

COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the whole world within three months after it emerged in Wuhan, China, and negatively affected both social and business life in all countries. Despite the measures taken, disruptions and radical changes occurred in all aspects of life, including social and business lifestyles. Many governments have taken steps to minimize the adverse impact of the pandemic on businesses to ensure their survival. In addition to those measures, organizations tried to ensure the continuity of their operations by implementing new working styles. Working from home, or remote working, was one of those new work styles, and the most critical concern questioned how the performance of employees would be affected during this period.

The case for call center agents is much more complicated than most other businesses. Unlike others, call center agents constantly need to be on the phone and in front of the screen to respond to customer requests. Furthermore, working from home may mean removing boundaries between personal and work life. There may be some advantages and disadvantages to working from home. For instance, blurred work-private life boundaries may be considered a disadvantage, while working outside the stressful work environment and not commuting to work anymore as advantages.

Moreover, most companies started to operate online, which is likely to cause the call centers' workload to increase compared to the pre-pandemic period. Under all these positive and adverse conditions, job satisfaction and task performance is predicted to be affected significantly. This study is designed to investigate the effects of work location on task performance and the mediating role of job satisfaction, if there is any, in call centers. The aim of this research is to investigate the effects of remote working on employees' perceived performance of the tasks related to their key performance indicators (KPIs), namely, specific task performance. This study is designed to measure the perceived general, and specific task performance of the employees working only from home, both from home and workplace on certain days of the week, and from the workplace only, and compare them. This study is conducted with the participation of all call center agents of one call center to prevent the interference of other organizational variables.

1. Literature review

1.1. COVID-19 period

The COVID-19 pandemic is the most prevalent outbreak after the Spanish Flu pandemic, which occurred in March 1918 and caused millions of people to die, and it is the first pandemic experienced by the last four generations to this extent and with this global impact (Sönmez, 2020). COVID-19 is a disease caused by a new coronavirus called SARS-CoV-2 (Wiersinga & Prescott, 2020). It was first seen in the Wuhan province of China in December 2019 and then spread all over the world, which caused, and is still causing, millions of people to die. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), more than 470 million people have been infected, and 6 million of them have died (WHO, 2022).

The global panic caused by the virus has shaken old behaviors and deep-rooted customs, causing great changes and transformations in our society (Hrabi, 2020). With its profound impact on almost all aspects of economic and social life on a global scale (Brammer et al., 2020), the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in various changes in business, such as reduced purchasing power of customers and hence, reduced consumption (Hamdan et al., 2020). States started to take measures to prevent the spread of the virus, such as closing borders for almost

anyone but their own citizens, prohibiting meetings, forcing face masks and social distancing rules, and all these changes were to be accepted as new normals (Brammer et al., 2020). The businesses had their shares of these new norms. Many businesses have either terminated, suspended, or reduced their activities, and most of them switched to remote work entirely or only for a few days a week.

1.2. Task performance

Task performance is an understanding under contractual terms between an employer and an employee or a manager and a subordinate to perform an assigned task (Pradhan & Jena, 2016). Task performance can be defined as an employee's fulfillment of the duties and responsibilities of the relevant role in the job description (Van Dyne et al., 1995) and depends on the employee's efficiency to fulfill the duties and responsibilities. In other words, it is about how effectively and efficiently the employees fulfill their responsibilities. Hence, employees' task performance contributes directly or indirectly to all company activities, including production and the efficiency and productivity of the company (Van Scotter, 1994). From the employee's perspective, task performance refers to actions that are "expected, evaluated and rewarded" (Leung, 2007).

While professional competence, clear job descriptions, a suitable working environment, and moral qualities are important for high task performance, a precise and reliable job description will increase (Gül, 2013), and an unclear job description will decrease the quality of the performance assessment (Kılıç, 2006).

Employees always have a perception of their performance. However, they not only fulfill the tasks specified in their Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) but also many different tasks within the organization during the day, and most of them are not specified in the KPIs. Therefore, employees perceive two different task performances: general and specific task performance (Aslan et al., 2021).

Perceived general task performance includes the perception of how the person performs all the activities in the company, whether directly related to KPIs or not, such as coming to work on time, helping teammates, the general quality of the service produced, and the contribution to company activities other than the tasks defined in the job description and KPIs.

Perceived specific task performance is the perception of the employees towards their performance related to main activities in their job description, which are often listed in KPIs. Moreover, all employees know what is in their KPIs what is evaluated formally or informally (Aslan et al., 2021).

General task performance perception should also increase if an employee perceives high specific task performance. The hypothesis reflecting this understanding will be given at the end of the conceptual framework section along with other hypotheses.

1.3. Call centers

Call centers help organizations to develop long-term relationships with their customers and create a critical bridge between them in favor of customer satisfaction (Taşkın & Taşkın, 2018). Therefore, call centers are a direct and effective communication channel with customers. Hence, call centers are the first contacts that customers refer to if they need information about a product or service, have a technical problem, or want to convey a complaint or request (Özdemir, 2018). Due to today's technological developments, businesses are able to be in touch with customers to have the opportunity to get their feedback on products and or services they

offer. On the other hand, customers can talk about satisfaction, dissatisfaction, or their problems directly with someone from the company. All these processes are being handled with call centers. Therefore, call centers gain more importance for businesses (Türkgözü & Sazkaya, 2020), which causes the call center industry to grow. The number of total call center employees in Turkey rose from 50,000 in 2010 (SERKA, 2011) to 115,000 in 2019, and the size of the market has reached about 7.5 billion TL (Call Center Association, 2021).

With the worldwide coronavirus pandemic, the demand for call center services has increased (Çatal, 2021) so far that the capacity potential and safety of call centers and their interactions with customers have never been tested as much as they have during this pandemic (Hrabi, 2020).

1.4. Remote working

Although the concept of remote working has recently appeared on the agenda of the business world, it is a system implemented in the IT industry before the pandemic. Nevertheless, remote working has become an essential part of our work life, and it is predicted that many businesses will continue the remote working system partially or entirely, even after the pandemic (Sayın & Aybek, 2021).

Remote working is defined as a way of performing a job and an alternative way of working based on the performance of duties from the employee's home or a similar place other than the workplace (Tutar, 2002; Tiryaki, 2016). The most fundamental aspects of the remote working system are defining working days and hours, work targets and expected results, measures taken for health and safety, and the provision of necessary technological infrastructure or equipment (Uyargil & Uluhan, 2000). Meeting these conditions alone will not be enough to maximize both the perceived general and specific performance of the employee working remotely; the employee must also acknowledge this psychologically and accommodate this new situation. After all, the work will be moved into the private space of the employee, and the boundary between private and work life will disappear. Removal of the boundary of the employees' private space and workplace may have a negative effect on their task performance, while staying away from the stressful environment of the workplace and not having a commute to work may have a significant and positive effect.

Since employees would think that they have given up their private lives and invested too much in work and doing their best under the current unfavorable conditions, a significant and positive relationship between remote working and the person's perceived general and specific performance should be expected,

Our hypotheses reflecting this approach are as follows:

H1: The employee's work location has a significant and positive effect on the perceived general task performance such that the perceived general task performance of the employee working from home is significantly higher than the employee working only in the workplace.

H2: The employee's work location has a significant and positive effect on perceived specific task performance such that the perceived specific task performance of the employee working from home is significantly higher than the employee working only in the workplace.

1.5. Job satisfaction

The concept of job satisfaction was founded on Maslow's (1954) "Human Needs Hierarchy Theory" and Herzberg's (1959) "Double Factor Theory" and defined by Vroom (1967) as the emotional responses of employees to their jobs, positions, and responsibilities. Employees' responses that show contentment with the job are indicators of job satisfaction, whereas the responses that express discontentment are indicators of dissatisfaction. Job satisfaction is also an indicator of the extent to which the expectations are met (Weiss, 2002). In other words, the positive mental state that the employee has due to the job indicates job satisfaction, and the negative mental state indicates job dissatisfaction (Spector, 2000).

Job satisfaction is essential for organizations, as it affects the employees' perspective, the relationships they build in the workplace, their physical and psychological health, and thus their performance (Özgen & Yalçın, 2010). Job satisfaction is also important because it indicates how well the relationships and hierarchical structure within the organization are established and to what extent employees embrace the managers. Therefore, job satisfaction is an important indicator for managers who aim to keep the job satisfaction of employees at a high level.

Job satisfaction is essential for organizations due to its relationship with factors such as productivity, job alienation, intention to quit the job, internal conflicts, and occupational accidents. Even if a high level of job satisfaction does not directly increase the performance of employees, it affects the overall performance of the organization due to the motivation, commitment, and other internal changes it brings (Bayrak Kök, 2006; Carroll & Tosi, 1977).

Another critical aspect of job satisfaction is to prevent job alienation. Employees who experience job alienation isolate themselves from the work and organization, do not feel like members of the organization and have weaker business networks and friendships (Başaran, 1998).

The other two aspects that relate to job satisfaction that make it important for organizations are absenteeism and intention to quit the job. Studies show that the frequency of absenteeism, intention to quit the job, and the turnover rate of employees with job dissatisfaction are higher than other employees (Bayrak Kök, 2006). Job dissatisfaction also leads to indiscipline and conflicts among employees (Kahn, 1973).

Job dissatisfaction causes distraction, poor concentration, as well as nervous, emotional, and mental problems in employees (Miner, 1992).

Factors affecting job satisfaction are examined in two parts: individual and job/organizational factors. Individual factors include an employee's individual and psychological characteristics such as personality, education level, expectations, work experience, position, age, gender, marital status, lifestyle, social status (Özkalp & Kirel, 1996; Glenn, Taylor & Weaver, 1977; Telman and Unsal, 2004; Garcia-Bernal et al., 2005). Job/organizational factors are related to the characteristics and nature of the job, such as the level of difficulty, the agreement between the work performed and the wage, the level of self-determination of the employee, autonomy, the ability to participate in decision-making mechanisms within the organization, the opportunity to progress in the career and promotions, organizational policies, work conditions (Alsat, 2016; Bozkurt & Bozkurt, 2008; Erdil et al., 2011; Özpehlivan, 2018; Nergiz & Yılmaz, 2016; Sevimli & İşcan, 2005; Özaydın & Özdemir, 2014; Mitchell and Larson, 1987).

Remote working should affect job satisfaction positively since the employees will save time by not commuting to work every day, should feel safe during the pandemic, will be with their loved ones during the work hours, will be able to dress as they like, and will be able to behave and maintain a daily life as if they were not working. Furthermore, this increase in job

satisfaction should mediate the effect of work location on perceived general and specific task performances. Hypotheses reflecting this approach are as follows:

H3: Job satisfaction mediates the effect of the employee's work location on perceived general task performance.

H4: Job satisfaction mediates the effect of the employee's work location on perceived specific task performance.

The hypothesis that reflects the mediating role of the perceived specific task performance in the effect of work location on the perceived general task is as follows:

H5: The perceived specific task performance mediates the effect of the employee's work location on perceived general task performance.

2. Methodological approach

2.1. Research question, purpose, and importance

This study aims to determine the possible effect of remote working, which emerged as a new working system during the pandemic, on task performance and the mediating role of job satisfaction and specific task performance in this effect. Hence the research questions are “does remote working affect employees' perceived general and specific task performances? If so, does job satisfaction have a mediating role in this effect?” Moreover, “does specific task performance mediate the effect of work location on perceived general task performance?” The research model for this purpose is presented in Figure 1.

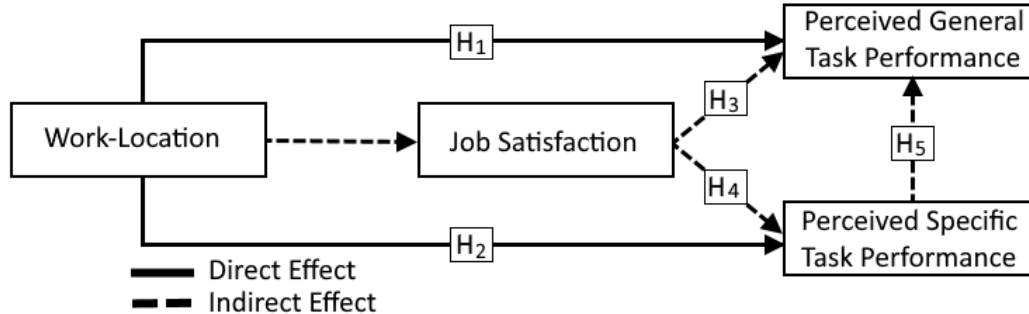


Figure 1. Research Model

3. Conducting research and results

3.1. Research method, measurement tools, and sampling

Within the scope of the research, a survey was conducted in a call center company located in Istanbul province of Turkey with the permission of the company management. The call center has employees working only from home, only from the workplace, and hybrid (certain days from home and certain days of the week from the workplace). All call center agents (n=421) participated in the study; a full measure was achieved. The questionnaire was shared in electronic form with the management, and management distributed it among the employees. Participation was entirely voluntary. No information that would allow access to the identity of the participants was collected.

In the first part of the study, participants were asked about their age group, gender, seniority, total time of work-life, and work locations.

In the second part, they were asked to evaluate their task performances. The one-dimensional, 4-item scale developed by Kirkman and Rosen (1999), which is adapted to Turkish by Çöl (2011), was used. Items were modified to assess the perceived task performance of the participants compared to the pre-pandemic period. The adapted items are as follow:

- Although I work from home during the COVID-19 period, I perform my tasks better.
- During the COVID-19 period, I reach my goals more easily.
- During the COVID-19 period, the quality of service I provide is much higher than in the pre-pandemic period.
- During the COVID-19 period, I find solutions to problems more quickly than in the pre-pandemic period.

Employees were asked to evaluate their tasks within the scope of the call center activities by using a 4-items scale designed by Aslan et al. (2021) to measure the performance of call center employees. Job satisfaction is measured with the 6-item scale created by Rusbult and Farrell (1983).

The demographic characteristics of the participants are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

		Coding	f	%	Total %
Age	24 and younger	1	34	8.1	8.1
	25 to 29	2	182	43.2	51.3
	30 to 35	3	133	31.6	82.9
	36 and older	4	72	17.1	100.0
Gender	Male	1	146	34.7	34.7
	Female	2	275	65.3	100.0
Education	Primary, Secondary and High School	1	100	23.8	23.8
	Associate Degree	2	151	35.9	59.6
	Bachelor's Degree	3	163	38.7	98.3
	Master's Degree	4	7	1.7	100.0
Seniority	0-3 Years	1	302	71.7	71.7
	4-9 Years	2	82	19.5	91.2
	10 years and above	3	37	8.8	100.0
Work Experience	0-3 Years	1	141	33.5	22.3
	4-9 Years	2	163	38.7	68.5
	10-15 Years	3	86	20.4	93.1
	16 years and above	4	31	7.4	98.1
Work Location	From home	1	209	49.6	49.6
	From both home and workplace	2	151	35.9	85.5
	Workplace only	3	61	14.5	100.0

Sample size N=421

Source: *own compilation*

3.2. Measure validity and reliability

Before performing the path analysis of the research model, the validity and reliability analyses of the scales were performed. Internal consistency and reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity were evaluated to verify the validity and reliability of the scales. Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) coefficients were examined to determine internal consistency and reliability.

The criteria for the convergence validity are as follows: Factor loadings are expected to be equal to or higher than 0.708; Cronbach Alpha and combined reliability coefficients are expected to be equal to or higher than 0.60 (Lyberg et al., 1997), and the AVE value is expected to be equal to or higher than 0.50 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2006; Hair et al., 2014; Hair et al., 2019).

Factor loadings should be equal to or higher than 0.70, and items with a factor loading below 0.40 will be removed from the model, and those between 0.40 and 0.70 should be excluded as well if AVE or CR values are below the threshold value (Hair et al., 2014). Cronbach's Alpha, AVE, and CR values of the scales are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Factor Loadings, Cronbach Alpha, CR, AVE Values of Scales

Variable	Item	Factor Loading	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Job Satisfaction	JS1	0.852	0.878	0.908	0.625
	JS2	0.771			
	JS3	0.664			
	JS4	0.717			
	JS5	0.825			
	JS6	0.891			
Perceived General Task Performance	GTP1	0.873	0.894	0.927	0.759
	GTP2	0.865			
	GTP3	0.904			
	GTP4	0.842			
Perceived Specific Task Performance	STP1	0.780	0.894	0.926	0.761
	STP2	0.904			
	STP3	0.917			
	STP4	0.881			

Source: *own calculation*

Since the factor loadings, CR, and AVE values that are given in Table 2 comply with the above-mentioned criteria, it is concluded that convergent validity is provided.

In order to verify discriminant validity, the criteria proposed by Henseler et al. (2015) and Fornell and Larcker (1981) are adopted. As per the criteria, the square root of the AVE values of each construct should be higher than its measures. The Fornell and Larcker values of the model are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Fornell and Larcker Values of The Model

	1	2	3
Job Satisfaction	0.791		
Perceived Specific Task Performance	0.380	0.872	
Perceived General Task Performance	0.302	0.838	0.871

Source: *own calculation*

The boldface numbers are the square roots of AVE values which are higher than their measures (off-diagonal values). All the VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) Values of the constructs were below 5 (the highest value is measured as 1.236, between Perceived Specific Task Performance and Perceived General Task Performance). Hence, it is concluded that discriminant validity is provided as well.

The dependent variable's coefficient of determination (R²) is used to assess the model. The coefficient of determination of the dependent variable should be above 0.10 (Falk and

Miller, 1992; Hair et al., 2019) in order to conclude that the model is acceptable. In this study, the R^2 of perceived task performance is found to be 0.707, and hence, it is concluded that the research model is acceptable.

3.3. Findings and discussion

The partial least squares path analysis (PLS-SEM) with the bootstrap resampling method (Chin, 1998) is used to reveal both the direct and the indirect effects of the independent variable on both dependent variables. Analyses were performed with SmartPLS 3.2.9 statistics software (Ringle, Wende, and Becker, 2015), and the results are reported in Table 4.

Table 4. The Statistical Significance and Path Coefficients (Direct Effects)

Independent Variables	Dependent Variables		β
Work Location	Perceived General Task Performance	H ₁	-0.070*
	Perceived Specific Task Performance	H ₂	-0.216***
	Job Satisfaction		0.035
Job Satisfaction	Perceived General Task Performance		-0.009
	Perceived Specific Task Performance		0.387***
Perceived Specific Task Performance	Perceived General Task Performance		0.827***

β : Standardized Coefficient; ; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Source: *own calculation*

As per the results given in Table 4, it can be said that work location affects both the perceived general and specific task performance of the employee. If the coding of the work location is taken into consideration (1: from home; 2: both from home and the workplace; 3: workplace only), we conclude that the perceived general task performance of the employees working at home is higher than those working at the workplace, which is our first hypothesis (H1). Moreover, the perceived special task performance of the employees working at home is higher than those working at the workplace, which is our second hypothesis (H2). Hence both hypotheses are supported.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with post hoc comparisons (Games-Howell post hoc test that assumes unequal variance between groups) was performed by using SPSS 21 to determine if the differences between group means are statistically significant. As per the ANOVA test results given in Table 5, the differences between group means are statistically significant.

Table 5. ANOVA Test Results

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Perceived Specific Task Performance	Between Groups	34.136	2	17.068	9.264	,000
	Within Groups	770.118	418	1.842		
	Total	804.254	420			
Perceived General Task Performance	Between Groups	50.236	2	25.118	13.196	,000
	Within Groups	795.627	418	1.903		
	Total	845.863	420			

Source: *own calculation*

The Games-Howell test (Table 6) revealed that the perceived general and specific task performance of the employees working from home statistically differs from the others (i.e., the

perceived general and specific task performances of the employees who adopted hybrid working and those who work from the workplace only).

Table 6. Post Hoc Test Results

Dependent Variable			Mean		Sig.	95% Confidence Interval		
			Difference (I-J)	Std. Error		L.Bound	U.Bound	
Perceived Specific Task Performance	Games-Howell	1.00	2.00	,45432*	,14524	,005	,1123	,7964
			3.00	,74512*	,20322	,001	,2610	1.2293
	2.00	1.00	-,45432*	,14524	,005	-,7964	-,1123	
		3.00	,29079	,21435	,367	-,2185	,8001	
	3.00	1.00	-,74512*	,20322	,001	-1.2293	-,2610	
		2.00	-,29079	,21435	,367	-,8001	,2185	
Perceived General Task Performance	Games-Howell	1.00	2.00	,59982*	,14804	,000	,2511	,9486
			3.00	,85028*	,21521	,000	,3369	1.3637
	2.00	1.00	-,59982*	,14804	,000	-,9486	-,2511	
		3.00	,25046	,23047	,524	-,2973	,7982	
	3.00	1.00	-,85028*	,21521	,000	-1.3637	-,3369	
		2.00	-,25046	,23047	,524	-,7982	,2973	

1: Working from home; **2:** Working from both home and workplace; **3:** Working from workplace only

Source: *own calculation*

Indirect effects of the work location on both task performances are given in Table 7.

Table 7. The Statistical Significance and Path Coefficients (Indirect Effects)

Independent Variable	Mediator Variable	Dependent Variables	H	β
Work Location	Job Satisfaction	Perceived General Task Performance	H ₃	0.000
		Perceived Specific Task Performance	H ₄	0.013
	Perceived Specific Task Performance	Perceived General Task Performance	H ₅	-0.179***

β : Standardized Coefficient; ; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Source: *own calculation*

As per the results given in Table 5, only perceived specific task performance has a partial mediation effect (Zhao et al., 2010) on the effect of work location on perceived general task performance. Hence, only the H₅ hypothesis is supported, and H₃ and H₄ hypotheses are rejected because those effects are not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$).

The results are given in the total effect table (Table 8), revealing that the perceived general work performance is mainly affected by perceived specific task performance. The effects of job satisfaction and work location are at a moderate level.

Table 8. Total Effects

	1	2	3	4
1- Job Satisfaction		0.387	0.311	
2- Perceived Specific Task Performance			0.827	
3- Perceived General Task Performance				
4- Work Location	0.035	-0.203	-0.238	

Source: *own calculation*

Employees' perceived specific and general task performance is adversely affected if worked at the workplace only (coding of the workplace is 1: home only; 2: both home and workplace; 3: workplace only). The results also show that the work location does not affect job satisfaction.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed social and business structures and, consequently, work-life. Many businesses have switched to at-home/remote working, while some implemented a hybrid working style (Aksu, 2020) besides working only from the workplace. The call center industry was chosen for this study during the COVID-19 period mainly because employees in this industry perform more labor-intensive work than other industries, and we have not found many studies on this field in the literature.

Theoretical implications

This study has made the following contributions to the theory:

- This study revealed that job satisfaction does not affect the perceived general task performance but the perceived specific task performance.
- Another contribution of this study is that the “Perceived Task Performance” should not be measured with a single scale but requires job specific scale (Specific Task Performance).

Implications for practice

The research results revealed that the performance of those working hybrid or from home during the pandemic is higher than those working from the workplace only, which suggests that focusing on these working models even after the pandemic will affect both the job satisfaction and task performance of employees, and therefore organizational performance, positively and significantly. Moreover, this working model may contribute to an increase in employee satisfaction and commitment.

Recommendations for further research

Future studies, including the concepts of psychological ownership, job satisfaction, feeling stuck, harmony between the person and organization, and organizational citizenship variable and testing their relationship and effects on specific task performance and the effect of work location on them, will contribute to the literature.

Limitation

This study has some limitations as well. Due to the limitations listed below, the results should be interpreted carefully and accordingly:

- (1) adopting an online, unadministered survey may affect the responses;
- (2) the study carried out in a single organization, which may have limitations on generalizability,
- (3) the study is a cross-sectional study that adopted a convenient sampling method, which is another limitation.

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