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Article

Hybrid Work Model: An Approach to Work–Life Flexibility in a Changing Environment

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Abstract: Employees' work environment has drastically shifted from offices to homes. Telework is often a desired employee benefit, but employers consider it a temporary setting. The lasting COVID-19 pandemic has changed the concept of telework. Home office has gained importance and will likely become an essential part of the working environment even after the pandemic. This paper aims to identify the preferences of employees from culturally diverse backgrounds in relation to the setting of their work location and time after the end of the pandemic. A web-based questionnaire survey as a quantitative research method was used. Data were collected from employees in Slovakia and Kuwait. The research findings indicate that employees value time flexibility, although localization flexibility is also growing in importance. The proposed hybrid work model seems to be the most suitable solution in line with the employees' preferences. It is crucial to understand employees' needs in terms of working time and place because only workplaces that are designed for employees and show organizational resiliency can survive and maintain competitiveness in the future.

Keywords: flexibility; telework; work from home; hybrid work model; job satisfaction



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1. Introduction

As of April 2020, around 81% of employees worked in countries where business closure was required due to the COVID-19 outbreak (ILO 2020a). A rapid transition from office to home through localization flexibility proved to be a necessary solution. However, it appeared to be temporary. Telework in the form of a home office has been used, and we have become more flexible in terms of time and space. However, with telework, employees perform their work from home where they live with other family members and where their rights and welfare are difficult to guarantee effectively (Wang et al. 2023). Working hours often intersect with household responsibilities and social activities in the family environment (Xue and McMunn 2021). With continuous lockdowns and movement restrictions, employees have had limited opportunities to spend their free time away from their home offices. As a result, many employees have worked more than the scheduled working hours agreed upon in their employment contracts, thus negatively impacting their well-being and productivity (Nemțeanu and Dabija 2023). Such work setting has negatively affected employees' stress and overall health (Como et al. 2021). Even though most employees are used to working eight hours a day and standard working hours are preferred by a large number of employers as well as employees, we can assume that nonstandard or alternative work schedules will have greater significance in the post-pandemic era (Bolino et al. 2020).

Working from home or out of the office will likely persist, and home office will become an essential part of the working environment. However, has anyone considered employees' preferences? With an almost enforced shift to remote work, some employees may be realizing the benefits of remote working, thereby causing a shift in their mindset, while

others may be eager to return to their traditional work settings (Vayre et al. 2022; Hajal 2022). It is crucial to understand employees' needs regarding working time and place because only workplaces that are designed for employees and show organizational resiliency can survive and maintain competitiveness in the future and keep productivity, performance, and satisfaction at a high level (Asgari et al. 2022).

Therefore, this research focuses on issues related to setting up the work environment in the post-pandemic era from the perspective of employees in two culturally diverse countries, Slovakia and Kuwait. For data collection, a questionnaire survey was used. The main objective was to analyze employees' experience with the work-from-home practices during the pandemic and determine employees' post-pandemic work setting preferences in Slovakia and Kuwait. This study fills the empirical gap and provides missing information on post-pandemic work setting preferences. It is likely that the work model we knew before the pandemic (work only from the office or only from home) is no longer desired. Hybrid work allows employees to work from the office some days a week and then work from home the other days and offers flexibility in the workplace area in terms of workspace and work time. The research questions are as follows: *Which hybrid work model to set? How many days should employees work from home, and how many days from the office?*

The paper is divided into six sections with an introduction. The second section provides a theoretical background of the key terms used in the study. Additionally, the application of relevant concepts in Slovakia and Kuwait is reviewed. Thirdly, the research methods are described. In the fourth section, the results are presented and discussed. Finally, the research outcomes are concluded in the fifth and sixth sections.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Telework, Remote Work, Work from Home, and Home Office Defined

The term *telework* defines work from home or outside the workplace and is a subcategory of the broader concept of remote work. While *remote workers* can work at an alternative worksite outside the default place of work, teleworkers can work from any alternative workplace (Nilles 1994), and the use of personal electronic devices is an essential part of carrying out the work (Olson and Primps 1984). With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and recommended business closures, the not-so-new models of working outside employers' premises have grown in importance (Pulido-Martos et al. 2021; O'Rourke 2021). Many companies have implemented work from home as a short-term solution to this crisis. *Work from home* is known as home-based telework, which encompasses temporary and alternative working arrangement (ILO 2020b). The term also refers to working at a home office. It represents the form in which an employee works from home utilizing ICTs (information and communication technologies). *Home office* is a defined name for occasional work from home or as a flexible benefit.

Since there is no international statistical definition for these terms, countries use slightly different and sometimes overlapping operational definitions (ILO 2020c). Therefore, for the purposes of this research, the terms remote work, telework, home office, and work from home (WFH) are being used interchangeably.

2.2. Hybrid Work

Hybrid work arrangement blends traditional "in-office" work with "out-of-office" remote work (Cook et al. 2020) or telework. This blended strategy provides employees the flexibility to work from an office or any other remote location (home, coffee shop, coworking place, etc.) outside their employers' premises with or without the use of ICTs. According to Halford (2005), hybrid work changes the nature of work, organization, and management across domestic space, organizational space, and cyberspace. This paper focuses on a hybrid work model in which employees split their work time between their office and home. The combination of working at the office and work from home can benefit both employees and employers but may also lead to various issues arising from both work environments.

Many authors have examined work from home, emphasizing its effects on employees, managers, organizations, or organizational culture. The traditional understanding of *working from home* has been seen as a benefit for employees who could irregularly perform their work outside the workplace. It provides opportunities to divide the workday based on the obligations of individuals and possibilities to meet work- and non-work-related duties. Furthermore, working from home benefits employees who need to travel to work and, thus, saves time and reduces transportation costs, as well as employers who save money by saving facility costs (Barath and Schmidt 2022a). Working from home offers greater time flexibility and can boost focus and productivity when certain indoor environmental conditions of a home office are met, such as visual privacy, overall noise level, and freedom from distraction (Yang et al. 2021; Gratton 2021). Moreover, technology and technical support are other factors to be considered (Haines et al. 2002). Overall, it can lead to increased positivity, satisfaction with one's job, commitment to work, and reduced chances of burnout (Charalampous et al. 2019).

On the contrary, employee unavailability when needed, failure to complete tasks on time, lower flexibility in solving problems, and more difficulty with controlling the availability and performance of employees are some of the drawbacks of this work arrangement. In the long run, the effects of minimized social interactions and excessive workload of employees are visible (Ellison 1999; Cooper and Kurland 2002; Gareis 2003; Haddon and Brynin 2005; Gajendran and Harrison 2007; Sewell and Taskin 2015; Messenger and Gschwind 2016; Davis et al. 2020; Babapour et al. 2022; Srebalová 2022). Smoder (2021) claims that employees working from home tend to work longer hours, which may worsen the balance between work and life and kinship. Moreover, it leads to a decrease in recovery periods, which can have negative physical and mental health consequences, e.g., musculoskeletal problems, stress, feelings of isolation, or depression (Tavares 2017).

A presence *in the office* enables employees to meet and work together. Social interaction and collaboration may positively correlate with employee creativity, performance, and productivity (Jyothi Sree and Jyothi 2012; Zwanka and Buff 2021; Iqbal et al. 2021; Čajková et al. 2023). The factors mentioned above can be considered the most significant benefits of traditional office work or on-site work, which, in many cases, provide an argument for maintaining these work settings. Yet, the situation may depend on the type of office. Open-type offices provide a way for employers to control the performance of employees and make communication more effective, but in overcrowded spaces, noise can interfere with employees' potential to focus on work (Barath and Schmidt 2022b). Moreover, an overcrowded office space may present a challenging environment for introspective employees, cause stress or anxiety, and result in lowered productivity or performance (Needle and Mallia 2021). Lack of privacy and close surveillance are among the other drawbacks associated with working from the office (Ding 2008).

Notably, work settings change, and some duties are not necessarily performed in a physical workplace. Although hybrid work is relatively new in the workplace, and its benefits and drawbacks are still being discovered, it is evident that it leads to positive outcomes for both employees and employers. Zwanka and Buff (2021) argue that such reorganization of work, which is associated with increased freedom and autonomy to choose work time and space, can boost work-life balance, as it allows employees to balance multiple roles (family, personal, or career-related). Moreover, it improves efficiency, which can be considered the main benefit (Iqbal et al. 2021), as it allows employers to increase the quality and design of the workspace, minimize operating costs related to reduced office space, and improve employees' safety.

2.3. Application of Concepts in Slovakia and Kuwait

While the Slovak Labor Code (National Council of the Slovak Republic 2001) contains definitions that are often associated with international definitions, responses to the new situation have resulted in amendments. Two concepts have been clarified, including homework and telework, which shall be considered as work performed regularly from

employees' household (residence) or any other agreed place (this means a location other than the employer's workplace) using information technologies, in which electronic remote data transmission takes place regularly. In Slovakia, the concept of home office is not explicitly regulated in the Slovak Labor Code. However, it can still be implemented and governed by the principles of regularity, meaning that the arrangement can be either occasional or regular (Peráček 2021).

Home office is work performed occasionally or in exceptional circumstances from employees' household or a different place than what is defined in the work agreement. When an employee works explicitly from home, we can talk about home office, and such work will be considered telework or permanent home office. Only in this case that the employer and the employee will be able to agree on competencies in scheduling working hours, which shall be included in the employment contract (Vyas 2022).

Despite the gradual flexibility of the labor markets of the GCC countries (Young 2016), the Kuwaiti Labor Code does not legislatively define any of the flexible work arrangements; however, such work arrangements are available based on an informal employment contract—an agreement between an employer and an employee—or as a benefit.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Kuwait authorities have taken precautionary measures to mitigate the spread of the virus, which has accelerated the adoption of remote work practices. In March 2020, the government published a document: "Remote Work Guidelines for the Public Sector" (CITRA 2020). The guidelines applied to all government entities that could implement remote work based on predefined conditions, such as business needs, nature of the job, types of services provided, and health conditions of eligible groups. Government entities were required to provide all remote workers with the necessary technical tools and support. The transition to remote work has yet to be specifically applied to the private sector. During the pandemic, organizations in the private sector needed to determine whether they would require their employees to work during this period. As stated by Schmidt and Nutsubidze (2021), most of the organizations in Kuwait transitioned to remote working to some extent; however, some organizations introduced hybrid working—a combination of home and office work to decrease the number of employees in the workplace.

Due to the absence of formal work-from-home practices before the pandemic in Kuwait, the following hypothesis was tested in this research paper:

H₀: *Employees in Kuwait will be more likely to prefer working-from-home practices post-pandemic than employees in Slovakia.*

3. Research Methodology

This research aimed to investigate employees' experiences with work-from-home practices during the pandemic and determine employees' post-pandemic work setting preferences in Slovakia and Kuwait using a quantitative approach. Quantitative research involves collecting and analyzing numerical data to identify patterns, relationships, and trends (Queirós et al. 2017).

3.1. Data Collection and Sampling

The data for this study were collected through a self-administered web-based questionnaire survey. To ensure comprehensibility and inclusivity, the questionnaire was designed in three languages: Slovak, English, and Arabic. This multilingual approach aimed to reach a broader audience and minimize bias. Offering the questionnaire in different languages accommodated participants who were more comfortable responding in their native language. The language used in questionnaires is crucial in shaping how respondents understand and interpret the questions. The choice of language can influence how participants form their responses (Peytcheva 2020). This implies that using multiple languages in a questionnaire might affect the data obtained. Furthermore, the participants were provided with clear instructions on how to complete the questionnaire.

The questionnaire survey was divided into three sections. The first section gathered demographic information from the participants, such as age, gender, and other relevant characteristics. The second section focused on the participants' work settings during the pandemic, aiming to understand how their work arrangements were affected by the pandemic. Finally, the third section explored the participants' preferences for work settings after the pandemic, investigating their desires for future work arrangements.

The data collection period spanned the months of August and September 2021. A probability sampling technique, specifically simple random sampling, was employed to select the study participants. The target population consisted of employees working in Slovakia and Kuwait. The participants were recruited through company email lists and social media platforms. The intended sample size for this research was determined using a simple formula for an unknown population. Assuming a desired margin of error of $\pm 5\%$, and a z-value of 1.96 with a corresponding 95% confidence level, the target sample size was set at 385 participants from each country (Sapra 2022). However, the target sample size was not achieved due to the availability and willingness of individuals to participate (Romano 2006).

3.2. Descriptive Data Analysis

After the data were collected, descriptive data analysis techniques were applied. The collected data were analyzed using the MS Office software, MS Excel. The descriptive statistics summarized and described the key variables, including the frequencies, percentages, and means of each scale. The analysis aimed to provide an overview of the responses and identify patterns or trends within the data.

The questionnaire included 4-point Likert-scale questions. A Likert scale is a commonly used rating scale that allows participants to indicate their level of agreement, satisfaction, or preference. The Likert-scale responses were recorded and converted into numerical values in this case. This conversion involved assigning numerical values to each response option (e.g., -2 for very dissatisfied, -1 for dissatisfied, $+1$ for satisfied, and $+2$ for very satisfied, or 0 for least preferred, $+1$ for slightly preferred, $+2$ for preferred, and $+3$ for most preferred).

4. Results

4.1. Demographic Information

Responses were received from 354 employees. Overall, 71% of the employees worked in Slovakia, and 29% worked in Kuwait. Most respondents in Slovakia were female, and those in Kuwait were mostly male. Most respondents were aged between 30 and 39 years old. The breakdowns of gender and age are shown in Figure 1. The sample sizes are too small, and the ratios are not equivalent, although this research can determine several important insights. In addition, the components in some tables may not sum up to the totals due to rounding.

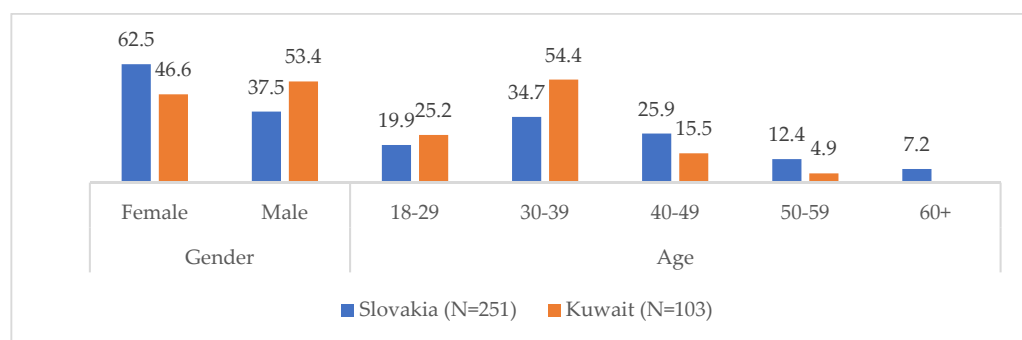


Figure 1. Breakdowns of gender and age (%). Source: the authors.

4.2. Work Settings during the Pandemic—Experience with WFH Practices

Among the 251 employees in Slovakia, 90.4% of the employees worked from home during the pandemic in some form. About 49.4% followed a hybrid work model and worked from home one, two, three, or four days a week. About 36.7% worked from home regularly, and the other 4.4% of employees worked intermittently from home. The remaining 9.6% of employees worked from the office despite the pandemic. In Kuwait, only 30.1% of the employees reported working from home in some ways during the pandemic. This is a significantly lower proportion compared to Slovakia. The hybrid work model (one, two, three, or four days a week) was reported by only 19.4% of the employees. The other 8.7% of employees worked full time from home.

Similar to Slovakia, another 1.9% of the employees worked from home biweekly or occasionally. Up to 70% of the employees continued working from their office or had no work-from-home experience (No WFH Ex) during the pandemic. More specifically, out of the 72 employees, 27 were assigned to work from home in some ways but reported that they did not work from home; therefore, they were considered to not have any work-from-home experience during the pandemic (Figure 2).

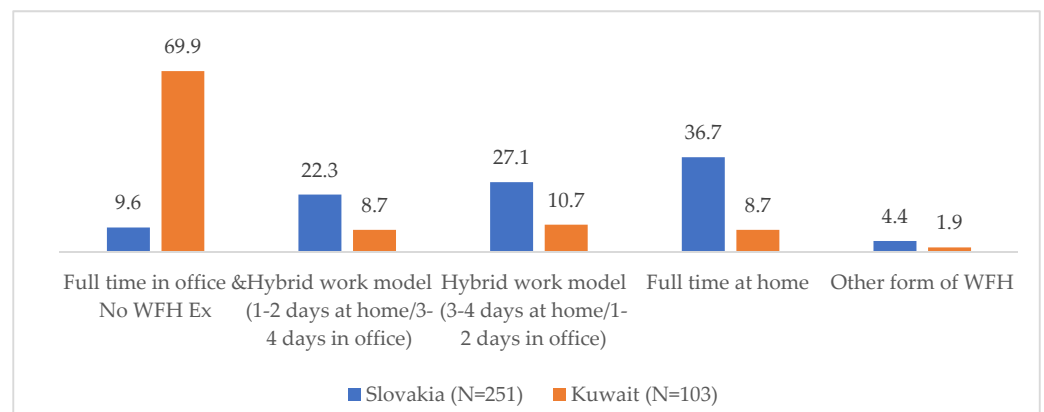


Figure 2. Pandemic work schedule (%). Source: the authors.

This part of the questionnaire survey evaluated employees’ experiences with WFH practices during the pandemic. Therefore, only responses from employees with work-from-home experiences during the pandemic were analyzed for this section.

In the sample (Figure 3), a significant number of employees in Slovakia (83.3%) and Kuwait (80.6%) reported no financial support from their employers during the pandemic.

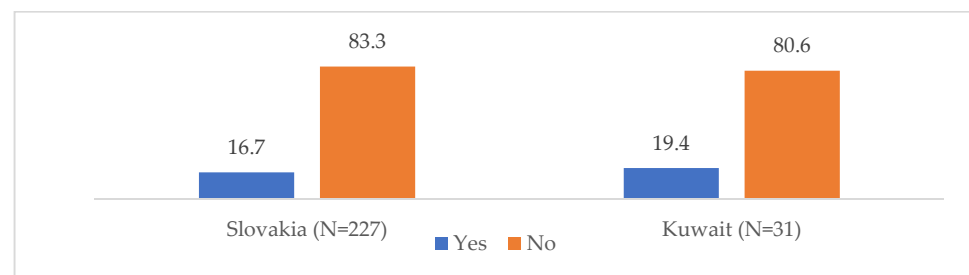


Figure 3. Availability of “home office fee” (%). Source: the authors.

There is a highly significant difference between the employees in Slovakia and Kuwait. In summary, the employees in Slovakia worked about the same number of hours as before the pandemic, whereas the employees in Kuwait reported a decrease in working hours while working from home during the pandemic compared to the pre-pandemic times (Figure 4).

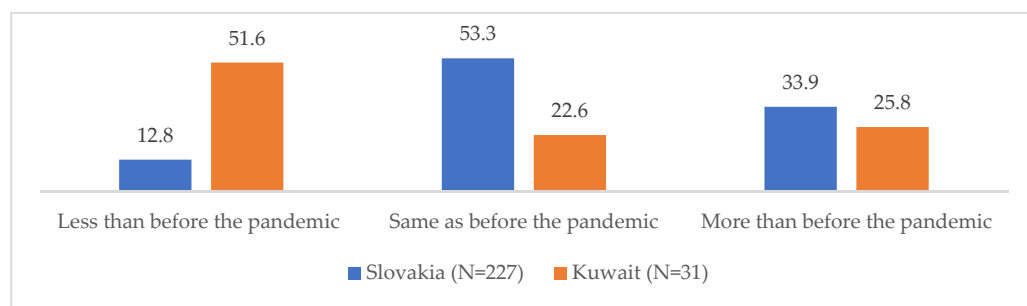


Figure 4. WFH Ex—working hours (%). Source: the authors.

Over half of the Slovak employees (56.8%) worked flexibly and with breaks during the day. One-third of the employees worked as per the working hours defined in their contracts. Slightly over half of the employees (51.6%) in Kuwait worked as per the working hours specified in their contracts. Employees who worked flexibly and with breaks during the day accounted for up to 20% (Figure 5).

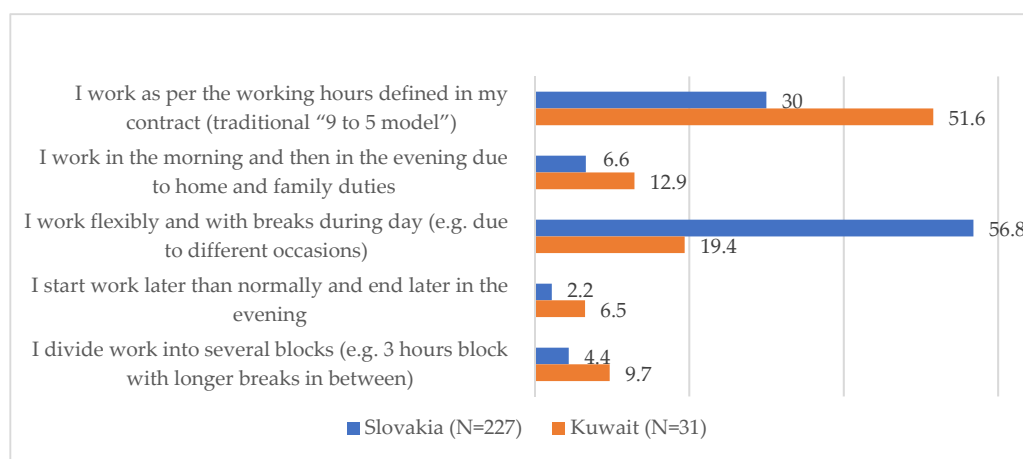


Figure 5. WFH Ex—organization of work and time (%). Source: the authors.

The employees in Slovakia and Kuwait gave a significantly different picture of their work-from-home experiences. The employees in Slovakia indicated that they better cooperated (65.2%), communicated (57.7%), and kept up with colleagues (56.8%) from their office rather than from home. On the other hand, about half of the employees felt more concentrated (50.7%) when working from home. They were able to better manage time (51.1%) and organize work (41.9%). Overall, the employees who worked from home reported being more effective and efficient (44.1%) under these conditions. More than half of the employees (52%) were more satisfied working from their home office than from a traditional workplace. These employees reported that working from home was as motivating (51.5%) as from the office, and their productivity (41.9%) did not change. In addition, the employees who worked from home during the pandemic did not notice any differences in terms of problem solving (44.1%), learning and career development opportunities (43.6%), self-efficacy (59.9%), and innovation (63.9%) (Table 1).

As for the employees in Kuwait, most of those who worked from home during the pandemic reported that *all job-related aspects listed above are better in the office than at home*. However, it is noteworthy that about the same proportion of employees (41.9%) felt more confident working in the office than working from home.

Table 1. Job-related behaviors based on WFH experience (Slovakia).

Better at the Office	About the Same	Better at Home
Cooperation	Motivation	Effectiveness and efficiency
Communication and connection with fellow colleagues	Productivity	Satisfaction
	Problem solving	Concentration
	Learning and career development opportunities	Time management
	Self-efficacy	Work organization
	Innovation of products or services	

The employees in Slovakia expressed greater satisfaction (mean = 1.1) with the pandemic-induced WFH practices than the employees in Kuwait (mean = 0.3). Overall, 88.1% of the employees in Slovakia and 67.8% of the employees in Kuwait were satisfied or very satisfied with their WFH practices during the pandemic (Figure 6).

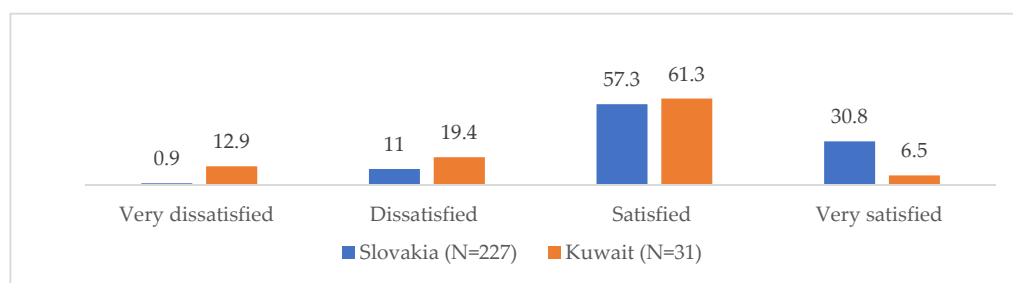


Figure 6. WFH Ex—overall satisfaction (%). Source: the authors.

The employees were asked to identify their (five) major concerns about returning to the office. Overall, the employees in Slovakia and Kuwait showed minor differences. The major five concerns are shown in Table 2. Most employees (74.9%) in Slovakia were concerned about transportation to work and commuting time. Fear of getting sick (50.7%) and maintenance of safety policies (50.7%) were other core concerns for the employees, followed by fear of maintaining productivity (48.9%) and moving to work from home due to other employee preferences (38.8%). Maintenance of social distance (33%) in the workplace was reported as the fifth concern. Other concerns were reported in the following order: effective collaboration (23.8%), caregiving for children and other dependents (22%), maintaining fairness and equitability (19.4%), and maintaining organizational culture (14.5%). It is noteworthy that 5% of the employees had no concerns at all. The major concern of the employees in Kuwait was fear of contracting the virus (61.3%). These employees were also concerned about maintaining safety (54.8%) and social distance (51.6%) in the workplace. About 35.5% reported fear of remaining productivity as the fourth concern, followed by the fifth concern of a shift to work from home due to other employee preferences, as reported by 32.3% of the employees. The order of the remaining concerns was as follows: effective collaboration (29%), maintaining fairness and equitability (25.8%), transportation and commuting time (22.6%), maintaining organizational culture (19.4%), and caregiving for children and other dependents (16.1%) (Table 2).

Table 2. Five major concerns regarding returning to the office.

Slovakia	Kuwait
Transportation and commuting time	Fear of getting sick
Fear of getting sick and maintaining safety policies	Maintaining safety policies
Employee preferences for work from home	Maintaining social distance
Maintaining social distance	Maintaining employee performance
Maintaining employee performance	Employee preferences for work from home

4.3. Preferences of Work Model and Settings after the Pandemic

This part of the questionnaire evaluated employee preferences regarding future work model and settings. Therefore, the responses of all employees, including those who worked from home (WFH Ex) as well as those who did not work from home (no WFH Ex) during the pandemic, were analyzed.

The employees were asked what work model they would prefer after the pandemic (in the future). Among the employees in Slovakia, 86.9% demanded work from home in some form in the future. While 35.1% of the employees preferred to work from home one or two days a week, the other 38.6% preferred to work from home three or four days a week. Only 10.8% of the employees chose to work from home full time. The other 2.4% of employees desired to work from home in some other forms, such as working from home 2.5 days a week, working from home 2 or 3 days a week, working from home biweekly, mostly working from home, working from the office only if necessary, and working from home in necessary cases (as a benefit). About 1.2% of the employees preferred flextime and work in the office or on site. Only 12% of the employees wanted to work from their office full time. In Kuwait, 54.4% of the employees preferred to work from home in some forms after the pandemic. Working from home one or two days a week was preferred by 33% of the employees. About 16.5% desired to work from home three or four days a week. Only 2.9% of the employees preferred working from home regularly (full time). Another 1.9% of the employees preferred other forms of work-from-home practices, such as working from home biweekly and biweekly with a combination of a 4-day workweek (combination of compressed workweek and hybrid work model). Only 1% of the employees desired flextime. The remaining 44.7% of the employees were more inclined toward working from the office full time (Figure 7).

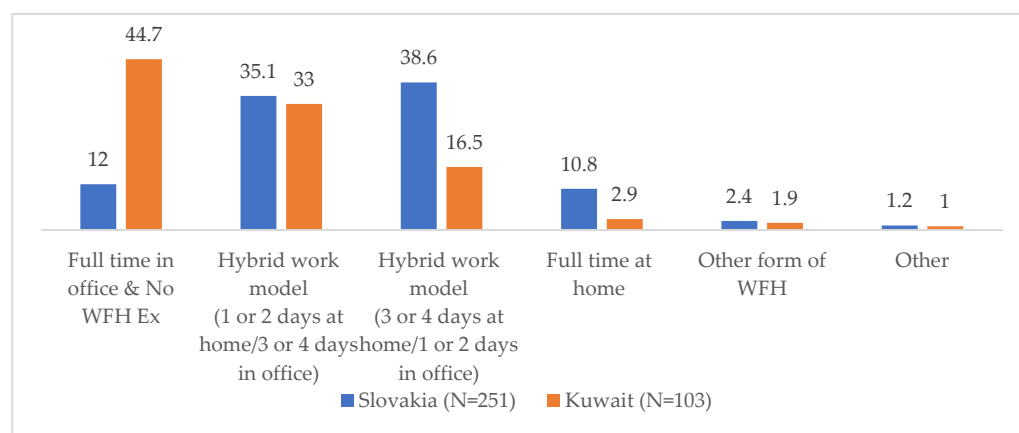


Figure 7. Post-pandemic preference—work model (%). Source: the authors.

A detailed breakdown of future employee preferences based on their work-from-home experiences during the pandemic is shown in Figure 8. Regardless of work experience and country, less than 50% of the employees would prefer to work from the office. Instead, the majority would choose to work from home in some forms.

The employees were asked to identify (five) main reasons for their work model preferences. Overall, the employees in Slovakia and Kuwait showed major differences in the reasons behind their preferred work schedules. When selecting the most preferred schedule, the majority (62.5%) of the employees in Slovakia considered transportation and commuting time. About 61% of the employees chose their work schedule based on work and time efficiency. About 60.2% of the employees made their choice based on where they are more productive, 51% of the employees made their choice based on where they are more comfortable, and 50.6% of the employees made their choice based on where they have minimum distractions.

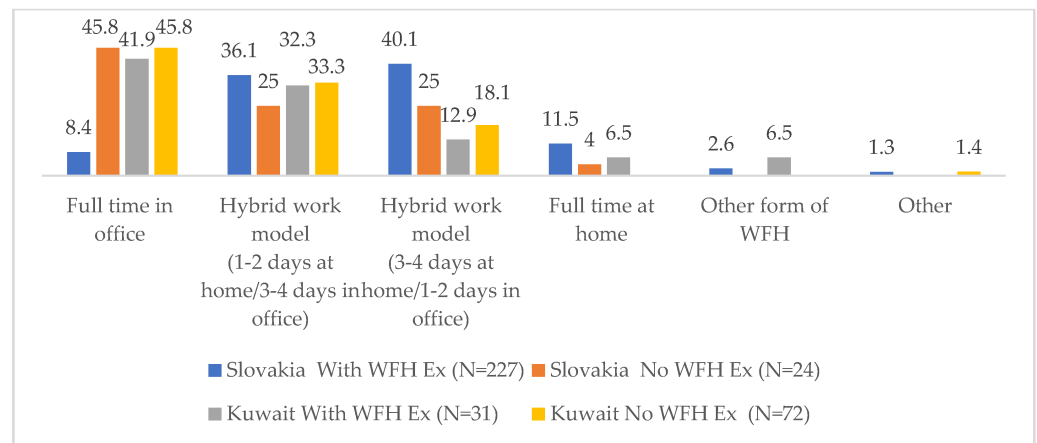


Figure 8. Post-pandemic preference—work model based on WFH experience (%). Source: the authors.

In comparison, the majority of the employees in Kuwait selected their preferred work schedule based on where they feel more productive (65%) and comfortable (63.1%). Being visible or accessible to others as a factor for selecting a preferred work schedule played a role for 42.7% of the employees. About 40.8% of the employees chose their work schedule based on work and time efficiency, and 36.9% made their choice based on their workplace layout (Table 3).

Table 3. Five main reasons for work model preferences.

Slovakia	Kuwait
Transportation and commuting time	Comfort
Time efficiency	Productivity
Productivity	Workspace layout
Comfort	IT setup
Distractions	Distractions

The employees were asked how they would organize their work and time if they worked from home after the pandemic (in the future). As shown in Figure 9, more than half of the employees (62.5%) in Slovakia would work flexibly and with breaks during the day. About 20.3% of the employees would work as per the working hours defined in their contract. Another 6.4% of the employees would divide work into blocks with longer breaks, start in the morning and continue in the evening due to home and family duties, or start to work later than usual and finish the work in the evening. Almost 11% of the employees stated that they do not want to work from home. One-third of the employees in Kuwait would work as per the working hours defined in their contract. The employees who would work flexibly and with breaks during the day accounted for 21.4%. About 11.4% of the employees would start work in the morning and continue in the evening, divide work into blocks, or start work later than usual and complete their tasks in the evening. Almost 30% of the employees reported not wanting to work from home after the pandemic.

The employees were asked about their preferences for work settings after the pandemic. The employees in Slovakia preferred more flexible working hours (mean = 2.37), more freedom to choose the location of work (mean = 2.34), prioritized health and safety (mean = 2.11), remote work (mean = 1.95), and greater digitization and automation of work processes (mean = 1.92), followed by “Home Office” fee (mean = 1.91) and IT equipment and support (mean = 1.84). As for the preferences among the employees in Kuwait, these employees preferred prioritized health and safety in the workplace (mean = 2.25), IT equipment and support (mean = 1.99), more freedom to choose work location (mean = 1.87), more flexible working hours (mean = 1.83), and greater digitization and automation of work

processes (mean = 1.59). The work setting that was slightly preferred was “Home Office” fee (mean = 1.17), followed by remote work (mean = 1.12) (Table 4).

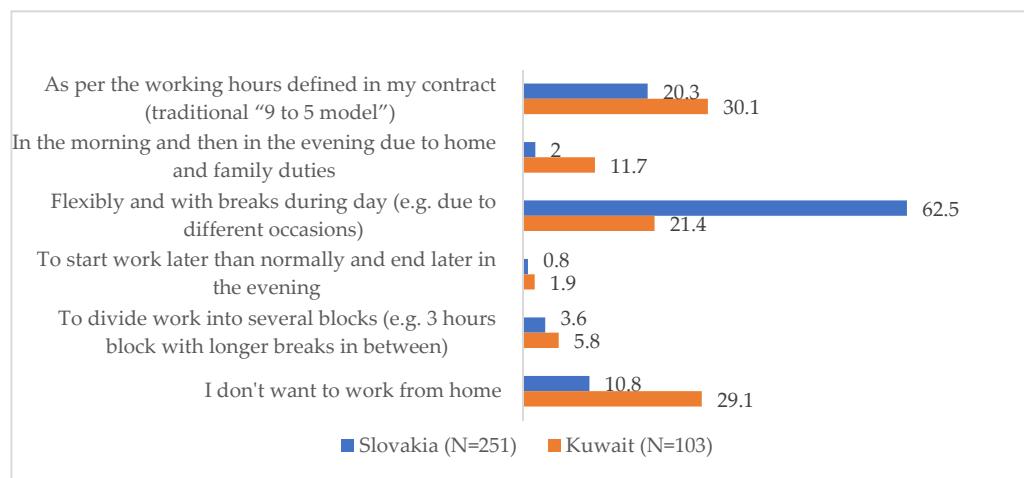


Figure 9. Post-pandemic preference—organization of work and time (%). Source: the authors.

Table 4. Post-pandemic preference—work settings.

Slovakia	Kuwait
Flexible working hours	Prioritized health and safety
Localization flexibility	IT equipment and support
Prioritized health and safety	Localization flexibility
Remote work	Flexible working hours
Digitization and automation of work processes	Digitization and automation of work processes
“Home Office” fee	“Home Office” fee
IT equipment and support	Remote work

4.4. Hypothesis

The results of employee preferences suggest that the trend of work-from-home practices will continue, particularly in Kuwait, where post-pandemic preferences for such practices have increased almost two times (54.4%) compared to WFH practices during the pandemic (30.1%). Contrarily, the demand for WFH practices in Slovakia has slightly dropped (86.9%) compared to the use of WFH practices during the pandemic (90.4%). Hence, the research hypothesis is supported.

5. Discussion

The obtained results from the questionnaire survey conducted in Slovakia and Kuwait correspond with the research results reported by Karácsony (2021) and Diab-Bahman and Al-Enzi (2020). According to Karácsony (2021), pandemic-induced telework had an apparent positive effect on the job satisfaction of the studied Slovak employees, and a significant portion of the surveyed employees would maintain teleworking even in the post-pandemic era. Diab-Bahman and Al-Enzi (2020) concluded that a more significant portion of the surveyed Kuwaiti employees would be able to work efficiently if given the option of a hybrid work model. The surveyed employees confirmed the global trends. Hybrid work is coming to the fore, and the time employees physically go to work five times a week seems to be over.

Practical Implication for Managers and HR Professionals

This study indicates that employees value flexibility, but localization flexibility is growing in importance in addition to time flexibility. Yet, only a minority of employees prefer to work from home full time. These results imply that hybrid work is the most

suitable solution that corresponds with employees' preferences. Table 5 suggests a hybrid work model that offers both localization and time flexibility and balances the benefits of working from office and from home. Employers may allow employees to work from home three times per week. The main purpose is to provide safety, save office-related costs, and satisfy employees' needs.

Table 5. Hybrid work model—localization and time flexibility.

Place	Regularity	Contract Option	Reasons	
			Employers	Employees
Home/Household (Defined as a place of working in contract)	3 times/week Permanent/Flexible	Formal agreement on the use of telework. Defined working time and flexible working hours.	Safety Cost savings	Family reasons Self-development Health
Office Coworking (Defined as all types of office → different place than home)	2 times/week Permanent/Flexible	Formal agreement with defined place of work and intensity. Defined working time and working hours.	Idea flows Brainstorming meetings	Work–life balance Social interactions

On the other hand, some employees still appreciate the opportunity to work from home but also need to be in personal contact with colleagues (easier communication or cooperation). In this case, renting a coworking place (a different place than home) is another option that employers have. Employees may work from an office or alternative coworking place two times a week. The main purpose is to allow employees to fulfill the need for social contact and run brainstorming meetings. In both cases, the conditions of employment, such as regularity, place of work, working hours, and working time, need to be detailed in the employment contract. Notably, the EU Parliament Resolution on the right to disconnect primarily speaks about when an employee is not allowed to work but does not address when and where they can and want to work. This can be considered a shortcoming because, as the research findings indicate, employees would like the possibility of choosing when and how they work. Moreover, work flexibility could significantly boost employee motivation and productivity (Davidescu et al. 2020; Sabuhari et al. 2020).

Nevertheless, successful implementation and application of hybrid work arrangements require a thorough consideration of the operation (employee and workflow management), workplace culture, technological infrastructure that enables effective communication, employee well-being, and identification of any skills gaps that may have emerged due to the change in work processes (Hopkins and Bardoel 2023). Each organization must design and develop a model specific to its needs, availability of technologies, and culture. Moving toward hybrid work models presents a risk due to the use of employees' networks and devices. Therefore, it is important that HR and IT departments focus on end-user education, security, and seamless connectivity that enables hybrid teams to communicate quickly and effectively. HR teams will need to focus on making employees feel connected when their employees work from anywhere at any time. Developing chances for employees to interact and connect in a non-physical environment will be vital in designing a healthy hybrid workplace. Managers must ensure that office and home office employees have equal opportunities in a hybrid workforce. Performance evaluations should be based on work outcomes rather than work processes. It is central to ensure that employees working from home do not feel isolated or invisible.

According to Iqbal et al. (2021), it is crucial to equip oneself with the necessary skills, such as trust, communication, awareness, technological skills, creativity, critical thinking, and time management, to flourish in a hybrid work environment.

6. Conclusions

Return to office will largely depend on government regulations in the event of an exacerbation of the COVID-19 pandemic; however, many organizations will want to avoid closing offices. Some organizations may allow entry to offices only for vaccinated employ-

ees. This decision is very individual and will depend on the need to implement tasks. This decision will depend on individual organizations and the needs of managers of individual departments. The implementation of many lockdowns had changed the perception of only work-from-home models from very positive to slightly negative (Čudanov et al. 2023). Thus, the formal application of a hybrid work model seems to be the best solution.

However, over time, many anti-pandemic measures went on the back burner. The main motive for keeping a hybrid work model has changed from maintaining workplace safety to work–life balance for employees (Shanker 2023). Organizations have transferred many activities to an online space with the aim of facilitating more efficient execution of processes, saving operating costs, and having sustainable employee performance management.

The biggest milestone is probably the shift in the acceptance of such a setup. From being a benefit in the form of working from home occasionally, it has turned into an inseparable part of competitive advantages where such a model is offered to employees (Barrero et al. 2021; Caraiiani et al. 2022). It can ensure business continuity, help organizations survive any unexpected crisis, and retain qualified employees.

This research offers value to managers and HR professionals alike; however, it has some limitations. The major limitation is the sample size imbalance. Integrating other methods for data collection, such as crowdsourcing, could have provided access to a larger group of participants. The second significant limitation is that the majority of the employees in Kuwait were assigned to work from home as a result of the pandemic restrictions, but in fact, this work arrangement did not really work. That means that although they were at home, they did not have real work-from-home experiences. In addition, this study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic when the employees' experience was shaped by a unique set of circumstances; hence, time could be considered as another limitation. Once the pandemic subsides, the conditions may change and working from home may feel different. As a result, the attitudes or preferences of employees may alter.

It will take some time to find a model that is truly balanced and different from the one we investigated and to identify all the advantages and disadvantages that will lead to maximum efficiency when applying a hybrid work model for employers and employees based on mutual preferences. Our research investigated employees' preferences for the work model after the pandemic. The focus was on employees' preferences and attitudes, and not exclusively on the reasons for their inclinations. The use of qualitative methods to better understand why employees prefer a specific work model seems necessary. Moreover, as employees are increasingly demanding the so-called hybrid work model, the following question arises: are organizations in Slovakia and Kuwait ready for this? This question remains unanswered.

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