



OPEN
UNIVERSITY OF
CYPRUS
www.ouc.ac.cy

FACULTY OF ECONOMICS
AND MANAGEMENT

POSTGRADUATE PROGRAMME OF STUDIES
«MASTER IN BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION (MBA)»

POSTGRADUATE (MASTER'S)
DISSERTATION

DISSERTATION TITLE

**Reimagining work life after the pandemic:
the Cyprus Institute case**

MICHAEL YIANGOU

SUPERVISOR
PETROS DEMETRIOU

NICOSIA, MAY 2022

Open University of Cyprus

Faculty of Economics and Management

**Postgraduate (Master's) Programme of Study *MASTER IN
BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION (MBA)***

Postgraduate (Master's) Dissertation



**Reimagining work life after the pandemic:
the Cyprus Institute case**

Michael Yiangou

Supervisor: Petros Demetriou

Open University of Cyprus

Faculty of Economics and Management

**Postgraduate (Master's) Programme of Study *MASTER IN
BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION (MBA)***

Postgraduate (Master's) Dissertation

**Reimagining work life after the pandemic:
the Cyprus Institute case**

Michael Yiangou

Supervisor: Petros Demetriou

**The present Postgraduate (Master's) Dissertation was submitted in partial
fulfilment of the requirements for the postgraduate degree
in Master of Business Administration (MBA)
Faculty of Economics and Management
of the Open University of Cyprus.**

BLANK PAGE

Summary

The dissertation goal is to identify, understand and report the main perceptions, beliefs and opinions of the employees of the Cyprus Institute regarding the impact of the pandemic on their personal and work life and on how this will inform and shape their work place in the future. A case study methodological approach is followed. The data collection was conducted with an electronic survey based on a structured questionnaire. The main areas of investigation were: remote work models, the challenges of working from home, health, safety and well-being of employees and the design and set up of office spaces.

In total 123 questionnaires were analyzed. The main conclusions of the study were that the Institute employees succeeded in embracing the telework approach and despite the lack of experience they adopted quickly and they will be comfortable with the implementation of a permanent remote work system in the future. The main concern regarding the work from home was social isolation. A significant percentage expressed concern regarding the long lasting impact of covid on the personal and professional life. Employees were confident about their performance, productivity, communication with line managers and collaboration. Another important conclusion was that the employees will not be comfortable with open plan offices or unassigned desks in the future.

Περίληψη

Στόχος της διατριβής είναι να εντοπίσει, να κατανοήσει και να αναφέρει τις κύριες αντιλήψεις, πεποιθήσεις και απόψεις των εργαζομένων του Ινστιτούτου Κύπρου σχετικά με τον αντίκτυπο της πανδημίας στην προσωπική και επαγγελματική τους ζωή και για το πώς αυτό θα ενημερώσει και θα διαμορφώσει τον χώρο εργασίας τους στο μέλλον. Ακολουθείται μεθοδολογική προσέγγιση μελέτης περίπτωσης. Η συλλογή των δεδομένων πραγματοποιήθηκε με ηλεκτρονική έρευνα βασισμένη σε δομημένο ερωτηματολόγιο. Οι κύριοι τομείς της έρευνας ήταν: μοντέλα τηλεργασίας, οι προκλήσεις της εργασίας από το σπίτι, η υγεία, η ασφάλεια και η ευημερία του προσωπικού και ο σχεδιασμός και η διαμόρφωση χώρων γραφείων.

Συνολικά αναλύθηκαν 123 ερωτηματολόγια. Τα κύρια συμπεράσματα της μελέτης ήταν ότι οι εργαζόμενοι του Ινστιτούτου κατάφεραν να υιοθετήσουν την προσέγγιση της τηλεργασίας και παρά την έλλειψη εμπειρίας υιοθέτησαν γρήγορα και θα αισθάνονται άνετα με την εφαρμογή ενός μόνιμου συστήματος εξ αποστάσεως εργασίας στο μέλλον. Η κύρια ανησυχία σχετικά με την εργασία από το σπίτι ήταν η κοινωνική απομόνωση. Ένα σημαντικό ποσοστό εξέφρασε ανησυχία σχετικά με τη μακροχρόνια επίδραση του Covid στην προσωπική και επαγγελματική ζωή. Οι εργαζόμενοι ήταν σίγουροι για την απόδοσή τους, την παραγωγικότητα, την επικοινωνία με τους προϊστάμενους και τη συνεργασία τους. Ένα άλλο σημαντικό συμπέρασμα ήταν ότι οι εργαζόμενοι δεν θα αισθάνονται άνετα με ανοιχτούς γραφειακούς χώρους.

Acknowledgments

I would like to sincerely thank my supervisor, Dr. Petros Demetriou, for his support and understanding during this period and his valuable feedback and advice through the whole process of designing, preparing and writing up this dissertation.

Special thanks and gratitude go to all my friends and colleagues at the Cyprus Institute for contributing to this effort through their willing participation in the survey and for sharing their ideas and thoughts during the early stages of the design the dissertation.

Finally and most importantly, I express my deepest appreciation and love to my family and to my true friends who essentially made this possible and pushed me over the finish line, in this challenging, and at times hard, journey. It would have not been possible without you.

I dedicate this dissertation to my lovely sons Leon and Noe.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1	1
INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 AIM AND IMPORTANCE	1
1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS	2
1.3 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY	2
1.4 DISSERTATION STRUCTURE	3
CHAPTER 2	4
LITERATURE REVIEW	4
2.1 TELEWORK AND WORK FROM HOME	4
2.2 HEALTH AND WELL-BEING	7
2.3 OFFICE SPACES AND DESIGN	10
CHAPTER 3	15
METHODOLOGY	15
3.1 INTRODUCTION	15
3.2 CONTEXT	15
3.3 RESEARCH PROCEDURE	17
3.4 DATA COLLECTION TOOL - QUESTIONNAIRE	18
3.5 SAMPLE AND DATA COLLECTION	19
3.6 DATA ANALYSIS	20
3.7 RESEARCH VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY	20
3.8 ETHICS	21
CHAPTER 4	22
RESULTS	22
4.1 INTRODUCTION	22
4.2 DEMOGRAPHICS	22
4.3 HYBRID VIRTUAL WORK	26
4.4 EXPERIENCES FOR REMOTE WORKING FROM HOME	34
4.5 HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELL-BEING	42
4.6 POST-PANDEMIC OFFICE SPACES	47
CHAPTER 5	51
ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION	51
5.1 REMOTE WORK	51
5.2 WORK FROM HOME EXPERIENCE	53
5.3 HEALTH AND WELL-BEING	55
5.4 OFFICE SPACES	57
5.5 RESEARCH LIMITATIONS	58
CHAPTER 6	59
CONCLUSION	59
6.1 FUTURE RESEARCH	60
APPENDIX A	62
SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE	62
REFERENCES	68

Chapter 1

Introduction

The global crisis caused by the pandemic has transformed drastically the way people go about their everyday life routines and the way they work. This is very likely to lead in many macro and micro shifts in perceptions regarding desired workplaces and work styles. Over the last two years many studies attempted to document, understand and interpret the multifaceted impact and consequences of COVID-19 on people's life (Parker, 2020, Brooks, 2020, Tušl *et al*, 2021, Griffiths, 2022). The potential perceived long lasting changes brought by the pandemic on work-life received less attention. This is of course understandable, as globally, until just a few months ago, many virus-connected restrictions were still enforced by national governments, and researchers paid more immediate attention to the impacts of social distancing and isolation, and to a lesser extent, the challenges of working from home. At the time of writing this dissertation, most countries were at the verge of abolishing most, if not all, measures. Infection rates are still high but with less hospitalizations, thanks to a large degree to the vaccination schemes, life is returning to some normality. But given the, in so many ways, traumatic last two years, is there a new normal? The main goal of this dissertation is to better understand perceptions and beliefs on a pre-selected set of themes regarding post pandemic work life and environment.

1.1 Aim and importance

Has the pandemic transformed office life permanently? This dissertation aims to identify the opinions and perceptions of the Cyprus Institute staff and PhD students regarding the possible long-lasting impact of the pandemic on the operation of the organization and the expectations on the future CyI workplace. Does the organization need to re-evaluate and

re-design the fundamentals of its workplace operation? Operational practices, office spaces, remote and hybrid work and the need for psychological support are the main domains that the pandemic has directly impacted with real ramifications on how they would be viewed in the future.

The dissertation is based on a case study; thus all conclusions will be specifically referred to the students and employees of the Cyprus Institute and the not general population of similar organizations, geographical regions or other specific contexts. The analysis concerns only the organization under question, which has its own peculiarities, norms and values. The responses are educated and informed by the organization's culture and by the specificities of its personnel. What is derived from this original piece of research could provide precious insights for the management of the organization regarding some of the fundamental components of its strategic planning: work mode, building program and health (physical and mental) and safety of all employees. Furthermore, the results could be the basis for further investigation, not only for the same population but also other more general groups, based on specific emerging perception patterns within Cyl.

1.2 Research Questions

The main research question of the dissertation can be further analyzed into four more specific questions, each one touching upon a specific theme:

1. What are the employees' perceptions and beliefs on hybrid work models?
2. What are the experiences and challenges of the employees when working remotely from home?
3. What is the perceived long lasting impact of the pandemic on the employees' well-being and mental health and what is the responsibility of the employer in terms of health and safety of its personnel?
4. What is the preferred set-up and design for the post-pandemic office?

1.3 Background of the study

In January 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak of COVID-19 as an international public health concern. In the weeks that followed, the virus spread

all over the world and based on the limited information at the time countries were forced to implement strict lockdowns in an effort to stop or at least slow the transmission rates with the main goal to avoid the overloading of emergency rooms and hospitals. Cyprus entered a full lockdown on 24th March 2020. Many restrictions were implemented including strict restrictions in movement and closures of schools and public spaces, shutting down all entertainment activities entailing social interaction, and even restrictions in private gatherings. Strict measures continued for months with intermittent periods of ease of specific restrictions. At the time of the final writing stage of this dissertation the Cyprus government has announced that in mid-May 2022, essentially all remaining pandemic related restrictions will be abolished. The impact on everyday life and the economy was severe, especially given the long period of the measures. Many businesses had to downsize, reinvent themselves or in many cases face closure. At many instances during this period work from home was mandatory and many people became accustomed to such an arrangement for the first time in their careers.

1.4 Dissertation structure

Following the introduction, chapter 2 of the dissertation provides a general outline of recent literature regarding the main themes being analyzed and discussed. This provides the necessary background for the questionnaire design, and more importantly for the better understanding of the results. Chapter 3 describes the applied research methodology, while chapter 4 critically discusses the findings based on the research results. Chapter 5 provides an in depth analysis of the most important outcomes and findings, providing context and comparisons with the existing literature and identifying patterns and correlations. Finally, chapter 6, which is the conclusion of this study, provides a unified commentary on the study including avenues for future research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Telework and work from home

COVID-19 has transformed telework into possibly one of the most important components of work life. Given the new realities, telework provides the desired flexibility by the employees, potentially support work-life balance while at the same time is reducing commuting drastically and thus the environmental impact of organizations (Belzunegui-Eraso & Erro-Garcés, 2020).

For the purpose of this study, the definition of remote work is synonymous with telework. Essentially, in such an approach an employee can operate either from home or another location, remaining connected to the employer and colleagues through a personal computer or other electronic devices and internet technologies (Miller, 2012). A more formal definition is given in Article 2 of the European Framework Agreement on Telework of 2002 stipulating that: *“Telework is a form of organising and/or performing work, using information technology, in the context of an employment contract/ relationship, where work, which could also be performed at the employer’s premises, is carried out away from those premises on a regular basis”* (Eurofound, 2010).

An extra dimension could be the option to work outside the common daily working hours of nine to five, such an adjustment to be done with the consent of the employer in most cases. Of course, somebody could stay connected from different sites and settings, but the strongest employee preference, due to the simple fact of convenience, is the option to be at home. It should be noted that in many cases, at least a fraction of the employees of an organization are characterized as ‘essential personnel’ for the purpose of that particular organization, and their responsibilities cannot be carried out remotely.

The COVID-19 crisis has drastically changed the way people work over the last two years. The most drastic shift in the employees' daily routine is the new operational mode and real choice for remote work and work from home, something expected to continue well beyond the pandemic. This is hardly a brand new development or a new office practice but rather an optional alternative, within the trend of enhanced work flexibility, which could be implemented by the employer depending on the specific circumstances and context (Baruch, 2000; Chung, 2018). It was, however, dramatically brought to the fore by the pandemic. In many instances over the last two years, significant proportions of the work force of the businesses which continued their operation during full or partial lockdowns, had to implement compulsory remote work regimes always in relation to the specific duties of the employee. Based on a European Commission recent report (Science for Policy Briefs, 2021), in many EU countries, more than 50% of the work force who had to telework during the pandemic, were doing so for the first time. Prior to the outbreak only 15% of EU employees had teleworked previously. It is still a widely used practice, even after the lift of the relevant restrictions, to allow employees to work from home as long as this does not affect their tasks and their performance. To better understand the context of this study, and again based on the Commission's report, it should also be noted that as of 2019 Cyprus was the country with the third lowest rate in the EU (approximately 2%) in terms of workers who worked from home on a regular basis or at least sometimes. Only a handful of EU countries had percentages over 30% (mainly from Scandinavia) while half of the EU countries were below 10%. It could be assumed, based on each cultural background, that the limited telework in EU prior to the pandemic was based both on the fact that employees were not ready or accustomed to the practice, but also to reluctance of employers to adopt such a model, as the dominant perception was that it offers less to zero control. The pandemic made this into a necessity.

Telework has been proven to come with many benefits for those who do not have specialized employment (Naor, 2022). The ability to work with a relatively enhanced independence from the hierarchy and the office physical and symbolic structures could provide more personal satisfaction and engagement leading to better performance, while at the same time minimize the stress levels. In particular, workers who are tasked to perform duties entailing a high degree of concentration without the requirement of

substantial interaction with colleagues, prefer to work remotely and they are more productive (Allen, Cho & Meier, 2014). Another positive element is the way employees could perceive, embrace and adopt teleworking practices, based on the experiences of COVID-19, both in terms of well-being and actual participation (Belzunegui-Eraso & Erro-Garcés, 2020).

Challenges are of course inevitable as well. They could vary from fundamental issues, such as not having a space at all to be able to telework from home or the lack of the IT infrastructure and the necessary connectivity. Teleworking can be successful only if the employer provides all the necessary resources and technologies. Other hindrances could be related to psychology and mental health issues such as loneliness and social isolation (Kniffin *et al*, 2021). There is always the risk that employees would become more individualistic in their approaches as a result of the limited interaction with others. A direct result would be the almost impossibility to maintain a strong community feeling with its many positive influences for an organization. Also it would lead to reduced knowledge creation, sharing and innovation (Naor, 2022). Supervision could be challenging as well. The modern technological tools could establish strong virtual lines between supervisor and supervisee but they run the risk of increased anxiety as in this situation the line manager can virtually invade in the personal space of the staff members of the team. Additionally Nell *et al* (2020) argued that models of virtual supervising and scrutinizing could lead to more centralized decision-making and could lower the employees' creativity. However on a more positive note other researchers argue that leadership could be effective from a distance (Antonakis & Atwater, 2002). Virtual collaboration is another practice that was accelerated because of COVID-19. Virtual teamwork could be effective but is lacking the rich communication of physical meetings and interactions and without following structured processes and pre-agreed alignments, runs the risk for limited trust between members and even conflict in discussions (Martins *et al*, 2004). Employees and collaborators engaging in remote interaction will most likely lose the creative benefit of direct physical communication (Allen *et al*, 2015).

When organizations limit physical interactions between their employees by design (remote work models), they need to consider the major challenge of maintaining or reshaping the organizational culture (Chudoba *et al*, 2005). Organizational culture could

be symbolic or pragmatic (Patterson, 2014). Symbolic culture is based on the declared values of the organization and the promoted actions and practices by the management. Pragmatic culture could be more impactful, as it is developed through the daily interactions and communications between the employees and essentially arises through the interpretation and practical implementation of the declared values (Asatiani *et al*, 2021). Extended telework models in organizations could seriously undermine organizational culture and the interconnections between symbolic and pragmatic.

Workers also have to face the disappearing and blurred boundaries between work and nonwork when at home (Ramarajan & Reid, 2013). Obviously, in the post-pandemic period the situation will not be extreme and people will not be tested in the same way they did during lockdowns. However, it remains a complicated issue and finding the necessary balance is not straightforward. Avoiding the daily commute to work is beneficial but the lack of a clear transition between the work domain and the family and personal life domain needs to be better understood as it is expected that telework will not only concern a small minority as before.

2.2 Health and Well-being

As countries all over world were introducing strict measures for at least slow down the spread of the virus during the pandemic, the impact on stress and anxiety was inevitable, as well as the negative consequences on the mental health and well-being of the population (Galea *et al*, 2020). The pandemic brought significant workplace challenges for the health and safety of workers. Recent research suggests that smaller organizations are finding it more difficult to adjust to the new realities. Despite that their employees continue to view the organizations as supportive, their well-being levels and their trust on health and safety practices are deteriorating after the initial pandemic phase (Brown *et al*, 2021).

The World Health Organization (2018) defines Mental Health as a condition of wellbeing in which each individual can realize personal potential, manage factors affecting daily life

and work and contribute to the community productively. Mental health many times is either ignored or at least not given the necessary attention in the workplace. Addressing mental health issues, even minor ones, is not a primary priority for many employers. The pandemic crisis and its grave consequences on the well-being of people in general and of employees in particular has elevated the discussion about mental health. The more dominant mental health impacts during COVID-19 such as stress and anxiety, depression, anger and fear have undeniably left their mark and it will be a long process until the situation is reversed (Torales et al., 2020). Extensive research in China identified that the pandemic created a large number of mental health problems including emotional and behavioral reactions. Some examples include social dysfunction, loss of confidence, depression, anxiety, and insomnia (Huang & Zhao, 2020). Any such symptoms should be interpreted through contextual and cultural filters. COVID has not created new mental health problems but has tremendously increased known risk factors (Jiang *et al*, 2021). What are the mental health changes brought by COVID-19- for workers and workplaces? What are the direct and indirect risks of the pandemic on employees?

There is no doubt that the pandemic drastically changed the way people live their life and the way they operate at work. One of the important manifestations of this change is what are the consequences for mental health and well-being. Multiple recent studies have argued that the way organizations operate and the conditions under which people work have worsened. As a direct result, employees are more inclined to experience mental health problems such as stress, depression and anxiety (Tušl *et al*, 2021). Brooks *et al*. (2020) reported that the quarantine impacted people seriously with many negative psychological effects and many researchers agreed that most likely the effects will not end with the end of all measures relating to COVID but rather will last much longer than the end of the pandemic. Rodríguez-Rey *et al* (2020) investigated the impact of the pandemic in the general adult population in Spain, concluding that the crisis has greatly impacted daily life. Their research reported significant numbers among the participants for psychological problems (36%), depression (41%) and stress (41%). A common theme or stressor emerging from the literature is the increased fear of the insecurity for loss of income or of termination of employment (Koh & Goh, 2020). The legislation and measures by the governments, limiting movement and socialization, contributed

significantly to the deterioration of mental health and well-being (Pfefferbaum & North, 2020).

Using an electronic survey tool for conducting extensive research, Eurofound (2020) reported in its key findings that people across Europe have had to deal with major changes in their general post-lockdown reality, with more working hours and perceived less job security. Younger people have emerged as the most affected age group as it is reported that they have the lowest level of well-being. Such an impact and feelings of exclusion pose a great risk for depression. Finally, based on the report, women continue to be affected significantly more and remain less optimistic about their future in comparison to men, and their work-life balance has been heavily impacted more in terms of less working hours and increased care responsibilities. This is of course interconnected with the profound increase in work from home arrangements. Again based on Eurofound (2020) data, the transition to remote work was profound as the work life of Europeans changed with 37% of all EU workforce having to work from home, 24% of them having to do so for the first time. Remote or virtual work became not a benefit offered by the employer or a preference and an option for employees as it was prior to the pandemic. Mandatory remote work became the new reality for large proportions of the work force (Kniffin *et al*, 2021). Such a dramatic change needs many readjustments to be made by the employee. From how to organize the work days and the home work space, to how to establish alternative ways of collaboration and communication with co-workers and of course to how to redefine the line between work time and non-work time (Cho, 2020).

Employees could feel burned out after extended periods of work from home without being able to change environments. The World Health Organization (2019) defines burnout as a syndrome resulting from workplace stress. When the workplace becomes the employee's home the dynamics change. According to WHO, workers with the syndrome are characterized by low energy and exhaustion, negative feelings for their job and even reduced professionalism. A survey of the American Psychological Association (2021) for the employees' well-being found heightened rates of burnout among workers in 2021. Nearly 60% of the employees reported increased work-related stress including low motivation and energy (26%) and lack of effort (19%).

All employers and organizations have no choice than being proactive in their support for the well-being of their people. Although, a variation is certain to exist on how the pandemic impacted different occupations and industries, as argued above, working conditions will not be the same for employees as prior to COVID. The associated risks could be chronic stresses and job burnout (Kniffin *et al*, 2021). If the employers fail to provide the appropriate support, the outcome of work from home could affect workers well-being negatively and, consequently, their overall attitude (Brooks, 2020). At the same time, being socially distant and lonely is directly associated with lower job performance as employees have a weaker connection to their colleagues and a lesser commitment to their employers (Ozcelik & Barsade, 2018).

The fact that the lines between work and social life are blurred when working remotely, employees cannot easily differentiate between the two (Naor *et al*, 2021). Work days could be extended, without even realizing, into what is normally time for socializing and relaxing, with a possible ramification the psychological and physical exhaustion of employees. Moreover, the challenges of the work from home regime for employees with young families should not be underestimated (Eurofound, 2020).

The COVID-19 crisis has radically changed the way people live and work. While most studies have focused on prevailing negative consequences, potential positive shifts in everyday life have received less attention. Based on research findings, the mental health of employees returning to work after prolonged periods away from the office could be improved but with a possibility of poorer physical health (Griffiths *et al*, 2022). Recent research identified five possible strategies that could be applied to support the employees better manage health, safety and anxiety by strong communication, implementation of policies and regulations, education and training and strong commitment from the management (Obuobisa-Darko, 2022).

2.3 Office spaces and design

Office space can be defined as the location in which employees of an organization perform their duties and responsibilities (Samani & Alavi, 2020a). The definition of office design

refers to the internal parameters, arrangements and given boundaries of the office space. The effective and efficient use of available office space, in many cases larger spaces are coming with a high premium, enables better communication, collaboration and creativity, and, perhaps most importantly, saves operational costs. These are the main drivers for the choices made in modern organizations in terms of both office space and office design (Samani & Alavi, 2020b). Many approaches are implemented with different degrees of popularity. Examples are the open-plan office, an approach which essentially eliminates most of the physical barriers between coworkers but each employee is allocated a specific desk, the desk-sharing approach, in which depending on the situation a specific desk is allocated to a different individual and hot-desking, an approach without any specific allocation of desks (Brennan *et al*, 2002).

The pandemic was a disrupting element on how office space is viewed. Even pre-COVID, research revealed the increased importance on establishing physically and emotionally safe environments for office workers (Singson, 2021). There is a wide consensus in recent literature that work-life and work-spaces will not be the same following the COVID-19 pandemic (Naor *et al*, 2021; Parker, 2020; Samani & Alavi, 2020a). More than two years after the beginning of the global health crisis businesses are still adopting and re-adjusting to the new realities. Are organizations shifting to more traditional design approaches and individual rooms?

What are the pandemic-related expected changes in office space planning and development? If most employees continue to operate remotely on a regular basis what will be the impact on how organizations approach office spaces, how will they plan investments in their facilities programs and how will they structure their current and future spaces? Perceptions and beliefs of employees, on how office spaces should be developed in the future, could be an extremely useful tool for the management of any organization. Spaces should reflect the requirements of the staff if the organization aims at the maximization of the efficiency and performance of individual staff members. What is ideal office environment based on the employees needs and perceptions? Some of these questions will be later addressed in the case study of the current investigation. To be in a position to start exploring the impact of the pandemic for future office spaces, the study

will review recent trends in office space development and investigate the relationship between office space design and employee performance and productivity.

Space and buildings have both a functional and a symbolic relation with the operation of any business entity and any given social organization (Baldry, 1997). Office space is a vital component of the employee's self-identification within an organization and certainly has a real impact on their positive attitude and sense of belonging, which are directly related with increased performance and productivity. It could be argued that the emotional and psychological attachment that could be created when employees are satisfied with their working environment cannot be matched by any remote work arrangement, no matter of the comforts and without downgrading the importance of limited commuting. It is important to understand that office size and office arrangements not only create a special bond between the organization and the people working for it, but also project status and significance within the hierarchy. It is extensively discussed and agreed in the literature that office space shapes employee's satisfaction, emotions and interactions (Vilnai-Yavetz, 2005; Barclay & York, 2001). In addition, the workplace identification of employees is weaker when their office space is not clearly defined and they are unable to exhibit that they are in possession of a personal space (Elsbach, 2003). Remote work and the fact that employees during the last two years were asked not to be at the office, sometimes for extended periods, certainly made such feelings of belonging and 'work identity' weaker and more complicated.

Most organizations are planning their personnel-related facilities development program, based on their financial capacity and the maximization of beneficial space ensuring that it will accommodate all office needs of their projected growth in personnel. Designing new and reshaping and renovating older office spaces is a vital integral component of the strategic planning of organizations taking into consideration, besides of course the core activity of the organization, the comfort, safety and well-being of employees. In a participatory approach of office design, employees should be asked about their current work environment and conditions and about their future needs. Popular responses include the issue of limited concentration due to work environment hindrances, the lack of spaces that support collaboration and the impossibility of having confidential conversations in shared or open plan spaces (Zoltan, 2014). Post-pandemic related health

and safety considerations have already entered the mix. Given the established relationship between the increase of productivity and the health and well-being of employees, all employers need to better understand the new realities. What type of work space is the one that will balance the needs of the work force on the one hand and the capabilities of the organization on the other? All variables should be taken into account. Extensive open plan offices provide flexibility and efficiency in terms of space use, but come with the compromises of limited privacy and limited concentration due to general noise or work calls (Zoltan, 2014). This line of argumentation could be extended to the limited ability to insulate people, to an extent at least, from current and future transmittable health risks when applying the open plan office model. On the contrary cellular office spaces, which could be allocated to one or up to four individuals provide adequate privacy and better health protection, but they do not provide the same ability for innovative communication and collaboration. Of course, when it is possible, office design could be planned to address all disadvantages and provide solutions for a combination model. The most recent popular model is office designs based on activities, in which fewer cellular offices are given to employees and the emphasis is on communal multi-purpose spaces, arranged to serve interactive functions, and promote innovation through collaboration (Zoltan, 2014).

For how long the activity-based approach would still be the preferred approach? Did the two years of the pandemic and the health crisis change the employers' and employees' perceptions on what constitutes an ideal office arrangement? These are some of the issues to be further explored in this dissertation. The office environment shapes in part crucial business factors such as the identification of employees with their organization, productivity and engagement. What is the relationship between work spaces and the health concerns of the employees' though? Colenberg *et al* (2021) through an extensive literature review in an attempt to investigate the connection between employee health and office interior concluded that open-plan offices shared between multiple people have a negative effect on the overall well-being. In addition, according to research, open plan and shared office spaces pose a much higher risk for employees to need certified sickness leave compared to those working in more confined spaces or could lead to increased stress (Rashid *et al*, 2009; Nielsen & Knardahl, 2020). Employers are asked to balance between indoor and outdoor space, cellular and open plan and the ideal number of square

meters per employee. The ever changing national guidelines, restrictions and other measures to safeguard and accommodate social distancing during the pandemic have left their mark. The capacities of meetings rooms, lecture halls and other communal spaces are now viewed through a different lens. The system was partly self-regulated through the restrictions themselves, as employers had to find the correct balance between the needed square meters per employee and the maximum percentage of the work force present at work at a given time. With the gradual lift of all the restrictions, questions remain on the right proportion of people in each space. To facilitate the partial return of the employees, within any applied remote work model, the workplace will need to be an attractive destination that will satisfy the employees needs for safety and well-being.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The case study under investigation, the Cyprus Institute, provides useful insights on how highly qualified scientific personnel are viewing the future of their work-life after the pandemic taking into account different manifestations of their everyday work environment and work routines. The case is particularly interesting as prior to COVID-19 there was no work from home policy or a culture for hybrid work. Given the nature of the academic work, of course, flexibility was always an integral part of employment. The results of this research are expected to be used for the strategic planning process of the organization as the findings could inform a number of policies, infrastructure plans and investments. This chapter analyses the context of the study, the research design and the implemented methodological approach.

3.2 Context

The Cyprus Institute is an international research and educational institution focusing on technology and mostly applied research. It is a non-profit entity of the wider public sector aiming to be a research and innovation hub in the Eastern Mediterranean region. Its mission is to strengthen the research community and culture of Cyprus, serve and support the Cypriot government with its knowhow and expertise and advance peace and prosperity of the region through science and technology. The Institute is developing large research infrastructures and establishing local and international partnerships in a set of major scientific and educational drivers such as tackling the climate crisis, innovating for sustainable and green development, analyzing and documenting the past. The main pillars of the Institute are four distinct multidisciplinary research centers and a graduate

school offering Master's and PhD degrees. All educational programs are embedded within the research activities and the large majority of the PhD students are employed part-time as research assistants in various programs and activities.

The personnel and students of the Institute originate from a diverse mix of cultures, ethnicities and backgrounds. As illustrated in Figure 1, the staff is very international in its composition with 45% non-Cypriots, especially when considering that administrative staff is to a large degree local.

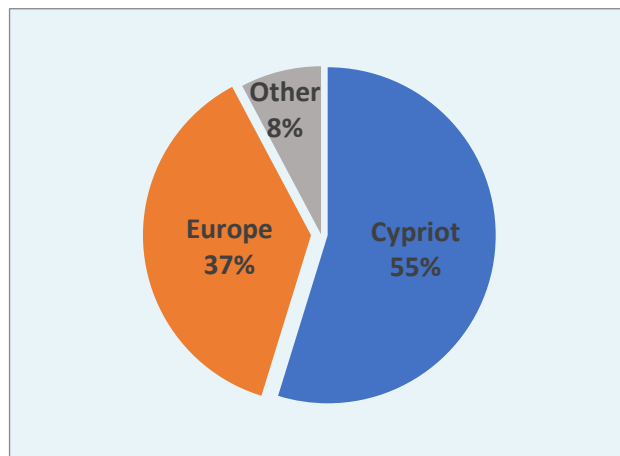


Figure 1: Nationality of Cyl staff

At the time of the distribution of the questionnaire the personnel number was as at 283. The corresponding number of the full time equivalent (FTE) was at approximately 230. This discrepancy is due to a number of unpaid and part-time appointments and to the part-time appointments of PhD students as research assistants.¹ The categories of the personnel are analysed in the below charts (Figure 2 and Figure 3). The make-up of the overall personnel is compared later with the categories defined in the questionnaire. The aim of this dissertation and consequently the content of the questionnaire aimed to capture the perceptions of employees and students without any focus on the anticipated changes in the direction of teaching and educational activities of academic institutions. There is a plethora of recent literature on the subject and this dissertation will elaborate on the impact of COVID-19 on students only in terms of their employment aspect as

¹ Based on the current internal Cyl policy on student employment, PhD students can be employed up to 0.5 FTE.

researchers. It is envisaged of course, in a follow up future research effort, to identify whether the student perceptions differentiate in any way from the overall CyI population.

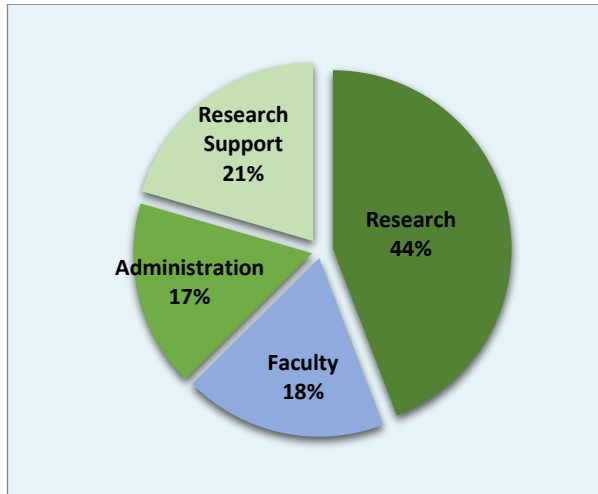


Figure 2: CyI Staff Categories - Headcount (%)

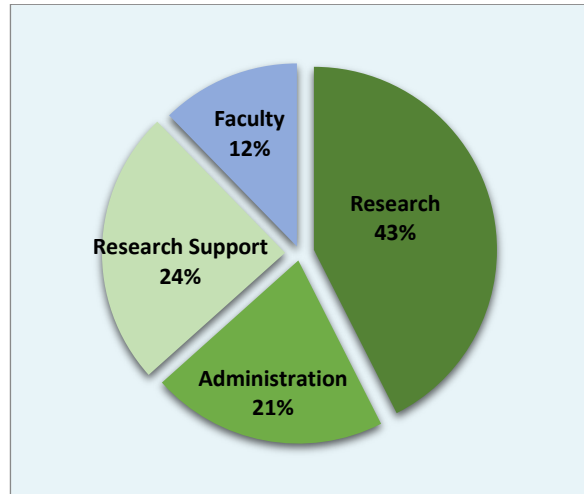


Figure 3: CyI Staff Categories (FTE)

3.3 Research procedure

Based on the findings of the literature review in terms of the areas and elements of work-life most affected by the pandemic and how their future is perceived by employees, four distinct categories were identified: implementation of hybrid work and work from home; health, well-being and safety of employees; use of office spaces and implementation of office designs. As indicated in the introduction the dissertation aims to answer the research questions below:

1. What are the employees' perceptions and beliefs on hybrid work models?
2. What are the experiences and challenges of the employees when working from home?
3. What are the perceptions of the employees regarding the concern of the employer regarding their health, safety and well-being? Is there a perceived long lasting impact of the pandemic on the employees' well-being and mental health and what is the responsibility of the employer?
4. What is the preferred set-up for the post-pandemic office?

To be able to answer the questions and capture the necessary data, a quantitative method was applied. Specifically, a questionnaire was designed for gathering and recording the perceptions of employees of the Institute. It was deemed that this approach gives the opportunity for efficient data collection given the time limitations for the completion of the dissertation. At the same time a sufficient enough sample number in relation to the total staff of the Institute could ensure with some certainty that any findings and observations will be representative of all the staff. However, any attempt on interpretation of the data should be done with the awareness and understanding of the inherent vulnerability of testimony (King *et al*, 2021).

3.4 Data Collection tool - Questionnaire

As already indicated the selected tool for data collection was a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire can be found in Appendix A. The questionnaire was designed after the preparatory stage of the literature review and the corresponding research framework on the subject matters. It was distributed to the potential respondents in the form of an online survey through the Google Forms online platform.

The sections of the survey included a total of thirty-seven questions. In the main sections of the survey the respondents are asked to make a choice regarding their answers following the Likert scale (Likert, 1932). There is a variety of available methods available to support data gathering, but the Likert method is a widely used tool for this purpose, specifically in survey research (Weng & Cheng, 2000). The Likert scale is commonly applied for measuring attitudes, perceptions, behaviors and values and allows for clear and uniform structure, easily understood by the participants. The assumption here is that perceptions and stances are measurable. Furthermore, the method could address the core meaning of a concept and the participants in the survey feel comfortable to provide their perceptions through this format, especially taking into account the online visual display (Subedi, 2016).

The applied method in this dissertation includes a series of statements that the survey participants could choose to be able to rate their responses to evaluative questions (Vogt,

1999). The series of statements implemented in the survey included five scale points with the following options for the respondents: 1= “Strongly Disagree”, 2= “Disagree”, 3= “Neither Agree or Disagree”, 4= “Agree” and 5= “Strongly Agree”. The scale points allow for standardization and quantification of the replies.

The main sections of the survey reflect variables directly related with the research questions. The first section informs the participants on the scope of the survey and the necessary confirmation of consent of all participants. The second section collects demographics while the third section asks for information on perceptions on hybrid work models. The fourth section focuses on employee experiences and insights regarding work from home and the fifth on health, safety and well-being. The sixth section refers to employees’ preferences in terms of the post-pandemic office space.

3.5 Sample and data collection

The data collection for the study was targeted to a relatively homogeneous population of only one institution. For the purpose of this study, references to the term population are used to refer statistically to the entire group of interest, the employees of CyI. The sampling was done in a purposive manner as the sample characteristics are defined for the purpose aligned with the study (Andrade, 2021). Approximately two hundred staff members of the Institute were invited to participate in the survey, a percentage just over 70% of the total CyI population. The selection was again targeted as there was a strong preference for regular full time staff and students. Given the relatively large sample size the expectation is that the results produced could be reliable and representative for the organization under question but not the general population in Cyprus or of similar institutions. The conclusions of similar case studies can only be generalized for the particular sub-population and not entire populations (Andrade, 2021).

In the end of the time given for the survey to be completed, 123 surveys were submitted, a response rate of about 62% in relation to the total survey circulation, and over 43% of the total CyI population. The percentage in relation to the total population is considered satisfactory as there was no intention, by design, to include in the survey adjunct, visiting or affiliated staff members. Taking out these personnel categories, the sample represents

over half of the total population of the regular staff. A detailed analysis of the sample follows in the presentation of the survey results, when demographics are discussed.

3.6 Data analysis

The analysis of the quantified results of the survey was done with the use of Microsoft Excel. The survey administration software used, Google Forms, allowed for automatic coding of the data in excel spreadsheets, a standard capability of this tool. Google Forms is a free, web-based software, part of the Google Docs Editor suite. Each group of answers is graphically presented with a relevant chart and comparisons are made between charts when needed. The analysis was mainly based on descriptive statistics.

3.7 Research validity and reliability

The concepts of validity and reliability are important for safeguarding the quality of the research process and research results. The reliability of the questionnaire used for the survey was taken into account in the process of the research design and the testing of the survey. A selected smaller sample of participants were asked to complete an initial version of the survey twice as a pilot, with a one week difference between each completion, prior to the actual time of the survey. This exercise not only produced useful feedback from the selected individuals for improvements and small adjustments in the questionnaire, but also was the basis for a basic check for consistency between the two sets of answers. The results were to a great extent consistent, an indication of a reliable questionnaire. However, given the time parameters and the possible disengagement of people to complete the actual survey twice, it was decided not to repeat this for the actual survey.

It is not easy or straightforward to assess the validity of the research tools. The fact that the design and construction of the survey was based on the literature review and existing knowledge of recently conducted research, and the high correlation of the results with conclusions of relevant research, increases the confidence levels (see chapter 5). Another validity related question is whether the survey captures all aspect of the impact of the pandemic in the shaping of the needs and perceptions for the future of work-life at CyI.

Based on the literature review the main impact variables were included in the designed tool.

3.8 Ethics

All survey respondents confirmed their consent regarding their participation and the use of the data at the very beginning of the survey. The consent ratio was at 100% as without the explicit consent agreement, proceeding to other sections of the survey was not possible. Each participant was informed that the completion of the survey was on a voluntary basis and that the survey administration software secured the anonymity of the answers. It was explicitly mentioned that the collected data will only be used for research purposes within the context of the author's Master's Degree Dissertation. They were also informed that following the completion of the dissertation, short summaries of the results will be circulated to all participants.

Chapter 4

Results

4.1 Introduction

The following chapter presents in detail the survey results with initial commentary for their meaning, value and interpretation. Further analysis of the research results in relation to the relevant existing literature and possible correlations will be discussed in the next chapter. As mentioned in the methodology, the participants responded using a five point Likert scale framework by rating statements with: 'Strongly Disagree', 'Disagree', 'Neither Agree nor Disagree', 'Agree', 'Strongly Agree'. Only two questions did not follow this pattern in which the respondents had to choose between particular options.

4.2 Demographics

As already indicated in the Methodology chapter, the total respondents for the questionnaire were 123. In the beginning of the survey all participants were required to provide five identification variables: gender, age range, years at CyI, place of residence and staff category. The specific characteristics were chosen to provide an overall profile of the sample and whether it is representative of the total CyI population, but also to give the opportunity to the author to investigate further in the future possible connections and correlations between variables.

The slight majority of the respondents were male. Particularly, 70 participants were male (57%), 51 participants were female (41%) and 2 participants identified themselves as neutral (Figure 4). The sample percentages reflect to a good extent the gender profile of the total CyI population, in which, currently, approximately 60% of the staff is male and 40% female. An example of an interesting future question to pose is whether there is a gender differentiation in how virtual work and work from home are perceived.

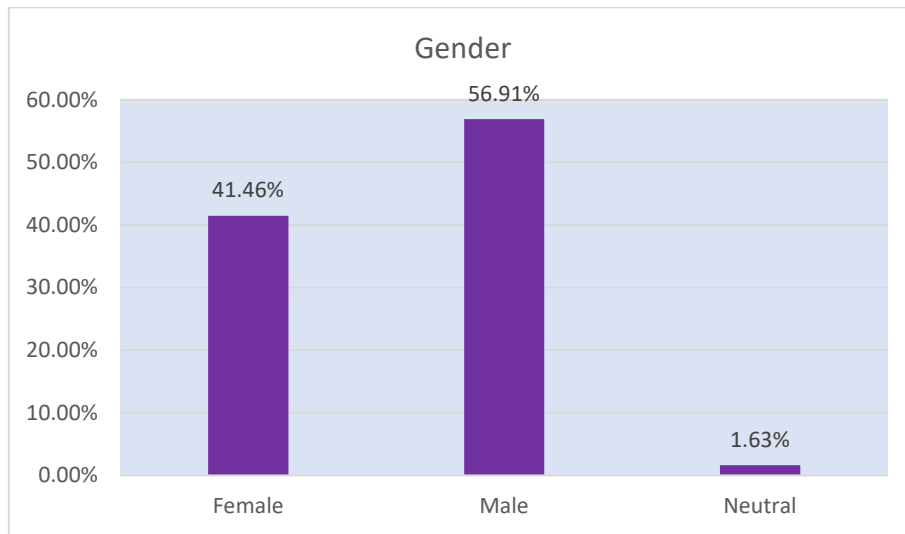


Figure 4: Gender

Respondents were asked to select the age group category they belong to. The four predetermined categories given are presented in Figure 5. The sample is quite representative of the relatively young total population of CyI with the current age average at 39.58 years. Most respondents, 49 in total, were between 30 to 39 years or 40% of the sample. The youngest respondents with a maximum age of 29 years formed the 20% of the sample (25 in number) and staff member in their forties formed the 26%. Approximately 14% (17 in number) of the participants were above 50 years of age. It should be noted that the most densely populated age category for the general population of CyI is currently the same one with the sample (30 to 39 years) with approximately 38%. An interesting insight for future study will be the identification of whether different age groups perceive differently the possibilities of virtual work and work from home.

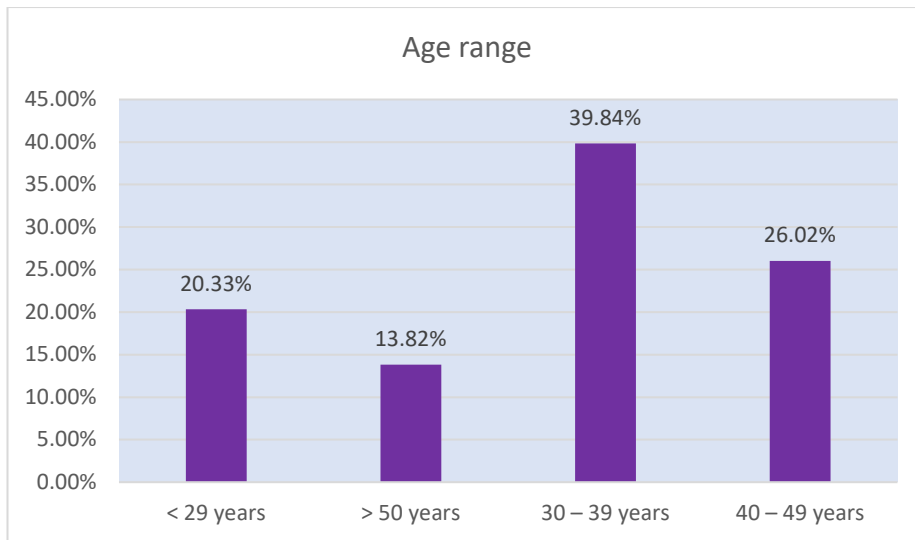


Figure 5: Age range

Another demographic variable that was deemed important to know was the years of employment of each respondent at the organization. Most of the participants (are employed at CyI between 1 and 3 years (Figure 6). In particular 47 respondents or 38% were in the said category, 28% are with CyI for over 8 years, 22% are with CyI between 4 and 8 years and 12% are with CyI for no more than a year. The distribution reflects the current situation at CyI as the organization has essentially doubled its personnel within the last 3 years.

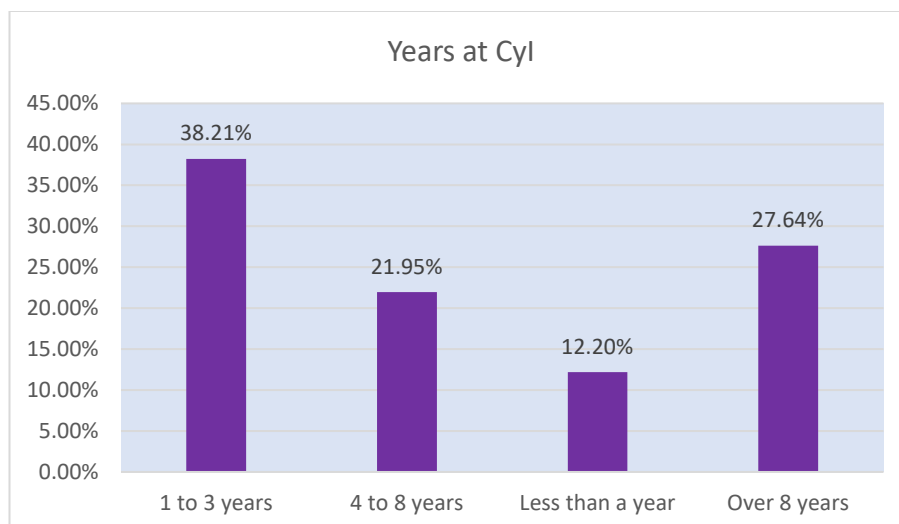


Figure 6: Years at CyI

Most of the participants are part of the CyI administration and technical staff. Administration is used in its wider definition as this category includes staff who are dealing with research management and administration. Specifically, 43% of the sample or 53 individuals were from administrative-research support category, 23% are researchers (28 individuals), 16% are faculty and 18% are PhD students. It should be noted that all PhD students at CyI are embedded in its research programs and are employed on a part time basis.

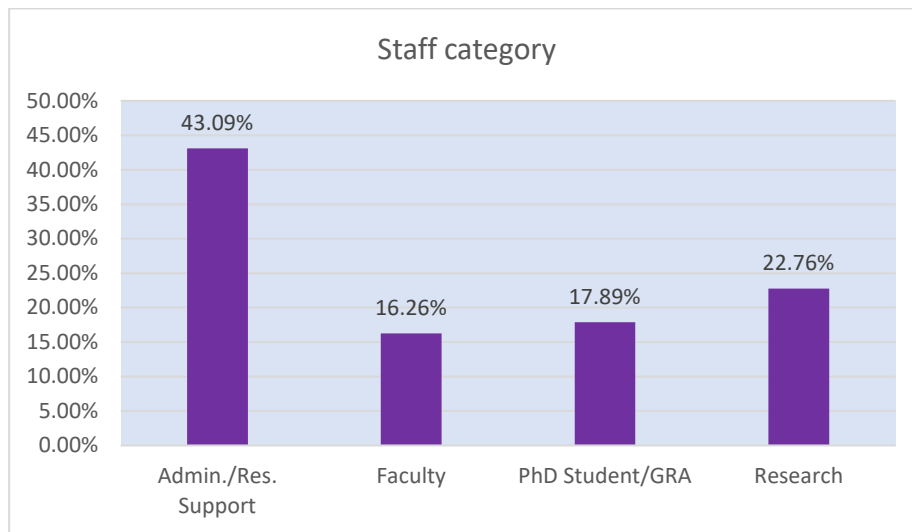


Figure 7: Staff category

The final demographic component required was the identification of the place of residence of the respondents. It was deemed necessary to include this as it will be interesting to investigate in the future whether there is a correlation between the place of residence and the positive attitude towards virtual work. In other words, to analyze whether people not living in close proximity to CyI have a stronger preference than others for working from home. The majority of the employees in the sample live in the center of Nicosia, in relatively close proximity to CyI (67%). Approximately 17% of the respondents live in the suburbs of Nicosia and 16% are from other districts in Cyprus.

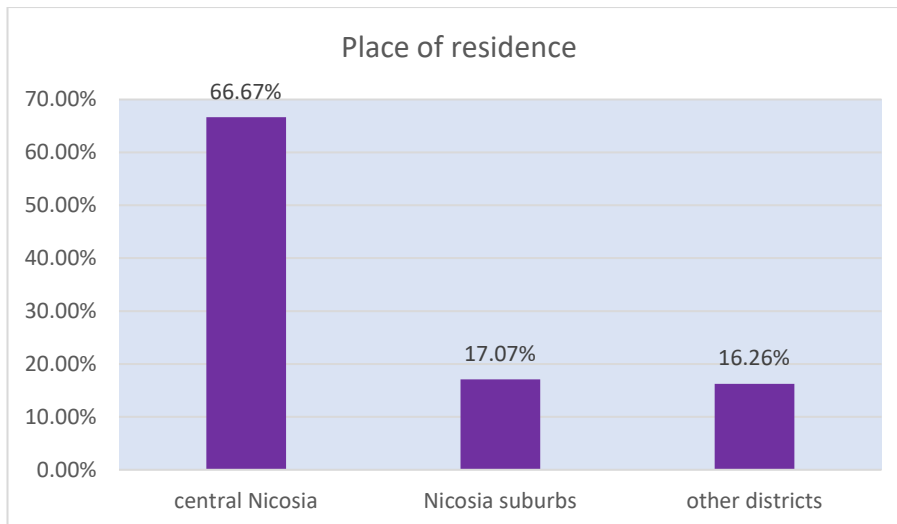


Figure 8: Place of residence

4.3 Hybrid virtual work

Following demographics, the first part of the questionnaire engages respondents regarding virtual work models and asks for their perceptions and beliefs regarding remote work, physical presence at workplace, hybrid virtual work models and possible impact of the new reality on the organization's culture. The participants were asked to rate on the scale of 'Strongly Disagree', 'Disagree', 'Neither Agree nor Disagree', 'Agree' and 'Strongly Agree', the following statements. Commentary and analysis for the results for each statement are provided below along with the corresponding percentage chart. An in depth analysis of selected themes follows in the next chapter.

Statement 1: Specific personnel categories who are not required to be on-site for their responsibilities could work fully remotely.

Statement 2: Physical presence to be optional.

Statement 3: CyI should implement a hybrid model with rotation of days in office (staggered work hours or days).

Statement 4: CyI should implement a hybrid model with extended flexibility to the employees to work from home when they agree with their line managers.

Statement 5: Post pandemic we should fully return to on-site work with minor exceptions.

Statement 6: Line managers are sufficiently trained to adopt and lead their teams in the post pandemic work environment.

Statement 7: An extended remote work model at CyI will alter the organization's culture.

Statement 8: Remote work cannot sustain consistent high performance.

Statement 9: If CyI allowed you to choose when you worked remotely, how often would you want to work remotely after the pandemic is no longer a concern?

- Full remotely
- Almost entirely remote (4 days remote)
- Mostly remote (3 days remote)
- Mostly in office (2 days remote)
- Almost entirely in the office (1 day or less remote)
- Full office
- The nature of my work does not allow me to work remotely

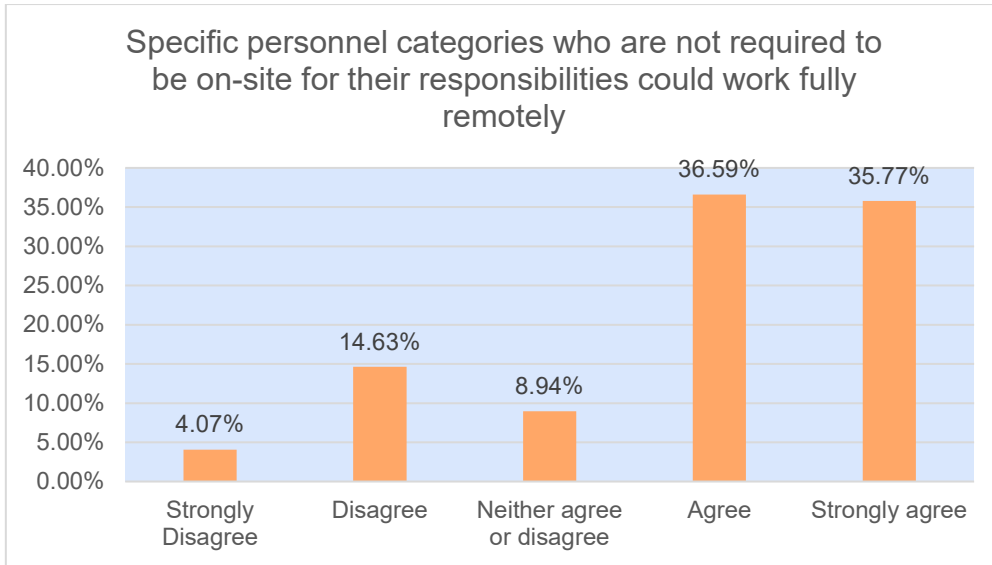


Figure 9: Possibility for a fully remote work model

The large majority of the participants in the sample (approximately 73%) were agreeable with the possibility that the organization implements in the future a system which will allow the option for employees, who are not required to be physically present for their tasks and responsibilities, for fully remote work. Comparing this with the combined low percentage of 21% who were disagreeable provides a clear message for the organization. The neutral option is not insignificant with 9%, but nothing that changes the overwhelming preference for the employees.

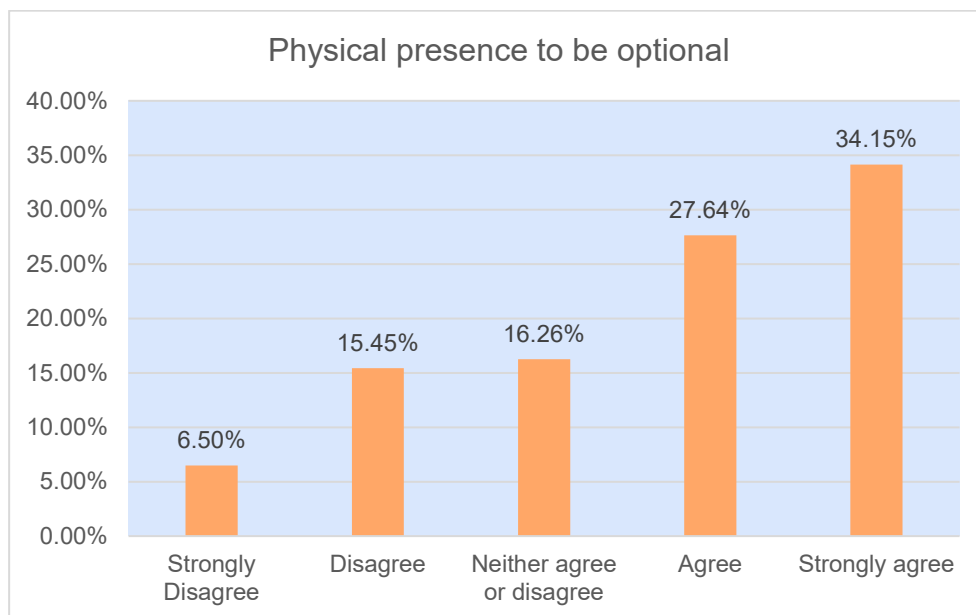


Figure 10: Possibility for optional physical presence

The strong preference pattern for remote work continues in the question regarding the possibility for the physical presence at work to be optional. Approximately 34% of the participants strongly agreed and 28% agreed. The combined position for disagreement is approximately at 22%. For such an extreme change in the operation of CyI, this is a surprising result. The organization always provided flexibility to its employees, but physical presence under normal circumstances was considered a given. No work from home culture existed prior to the pandemic. We could assume that the impact of the pandemic in the perceptions of the employees of CyI regarding how the organization operates is significant. Further analysis in the future will be useful in the future regarding the possible correlation of these perceptions with demographic characteristics such as gender, staff category and place of residence.

Figure 11 presents the percentages for opinions regarding a hybrid work model on the basis of rotational presence at the work place. Again, following the overall emerging pattern, respondents in their majority are in agreement with the implementation of a hybrid work model. This particular option is about the possibility of establishing an employee framework giving the option for beginning and ending the physical presence at work in predetermined times (essentially non-traditional work shifts). Employees could follow their own pre-agreed program either based on hours or days. In total 59% of the respondents were in agreement while 25% remained neutral. We could assume that the large percentage of 'neither agree or disagree' is a result of limited understanding of the term 'staggered'. The total level of disagreement remains low with only 17%.

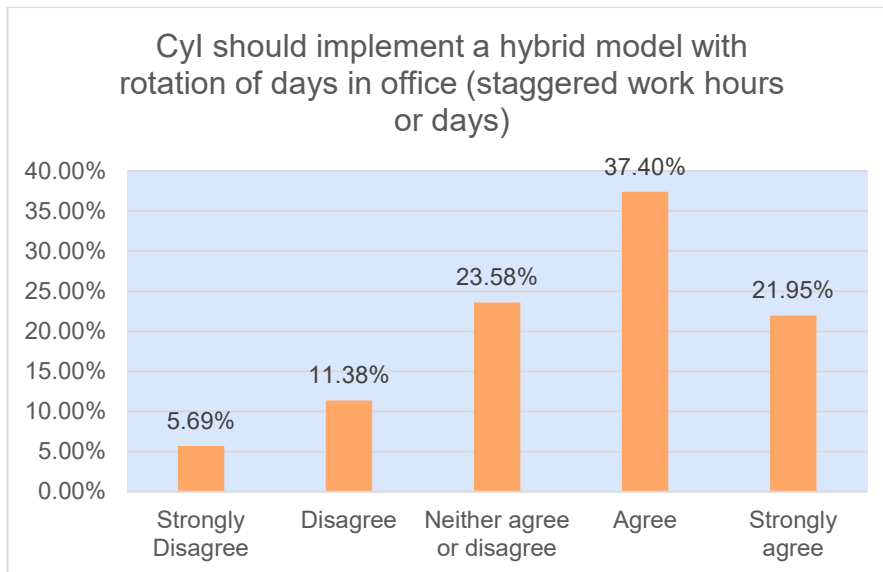


Figure 11: Possibility for staggered work hours or days

The next question requests the respondents to express their opinion on an even more flexible hybrid work mode, in which employees in coordination with their line managers, could define their work schedule in relation to physical presence at work. The extended flexibility of this model is extremely well received (figure 12). A staggering 86% of the employees in the sample stated that they are in agreement for such a model, 52% of them stating their strong agreement. The combined level of disagreement is a lowly 7%. Further analysis for this strong preference, which is also a message for the organization, will be conducted in the next chapter.

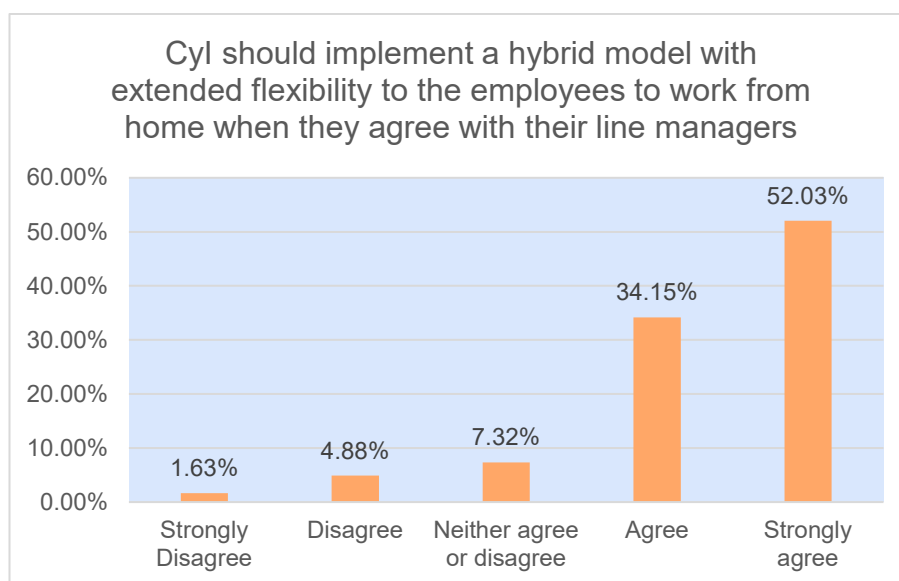


Figure 12: Flexibility based on line managers agreement

The results in figure 13 provide further back up and evidence for the preferences of the employees. Asking the question in essentially the reverse manner produces the same result, an indication of the internal reliability of the questionnaire. The combined level of disagreement with the possibility for fully returning to on-site work after the pandemic is approximately at 72% while the corresponding level of disagreement is at 15%. It should be noted that the level of strong disagreement is quite high with 31%.

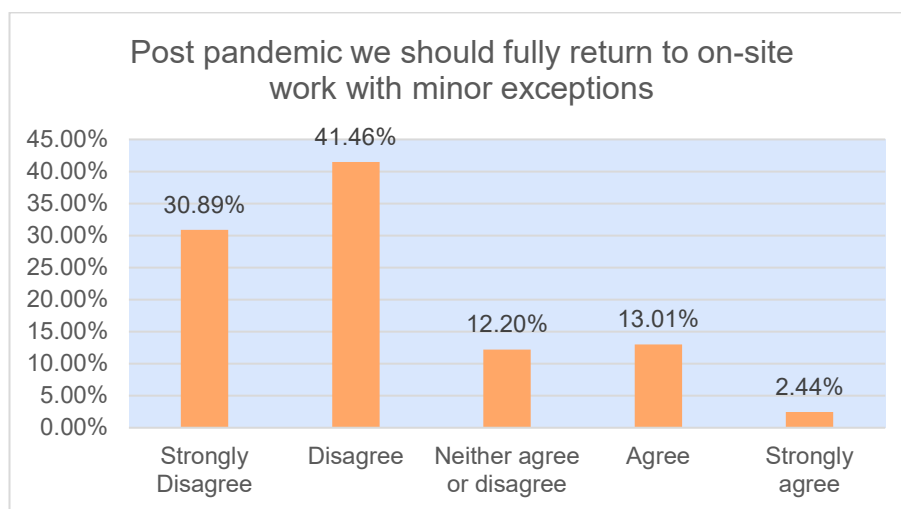


Figure 13: Post pandemic return to the office

Another related parameter with the apparent comfort of the respondents regarding remote virtual work, is the level of their perceived confidence for the sufficient training of the line managers to adopt and lead their teams in such a new environment with limited face to face time. The majority of the participants (a combined 55%) is in agreement, while the level of disagreement remains at 20%.

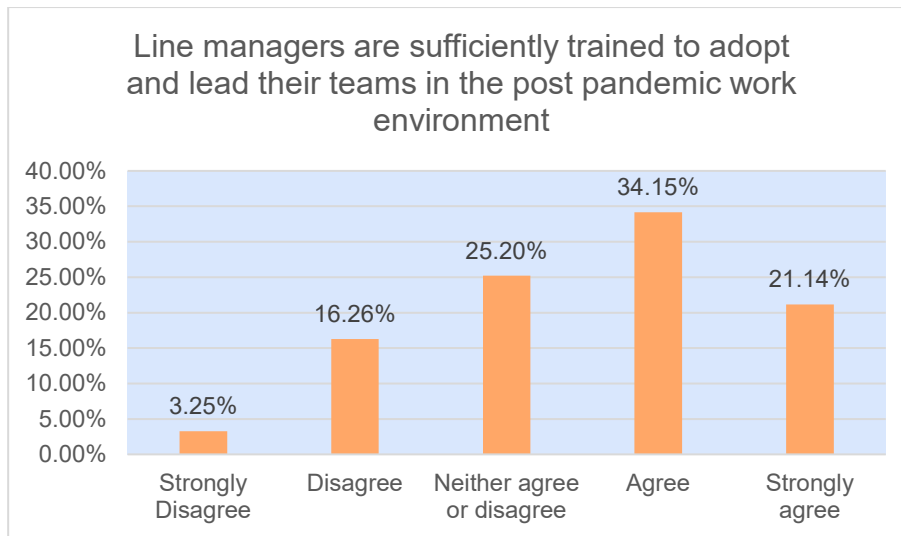


Figure 14: Adequacy of the training of line managers

While the respondents are very agreeable with possible significant changes in the way they will approach their presence at workplace following the complete abolition of all measures related with the pandemic, they partly recognize that such a model will alter the organization’s current culture. Approximately 39% of the participants agree with this specific statement while another 28% remains uncertain. The disagreement level is also high with a combined number of 33%. A relative balance is observed between the different main options. This is certainly a question needing further analysis and investigation both in terms of possible correlations and better understanding of the general perceptions regarding the organizational culture.

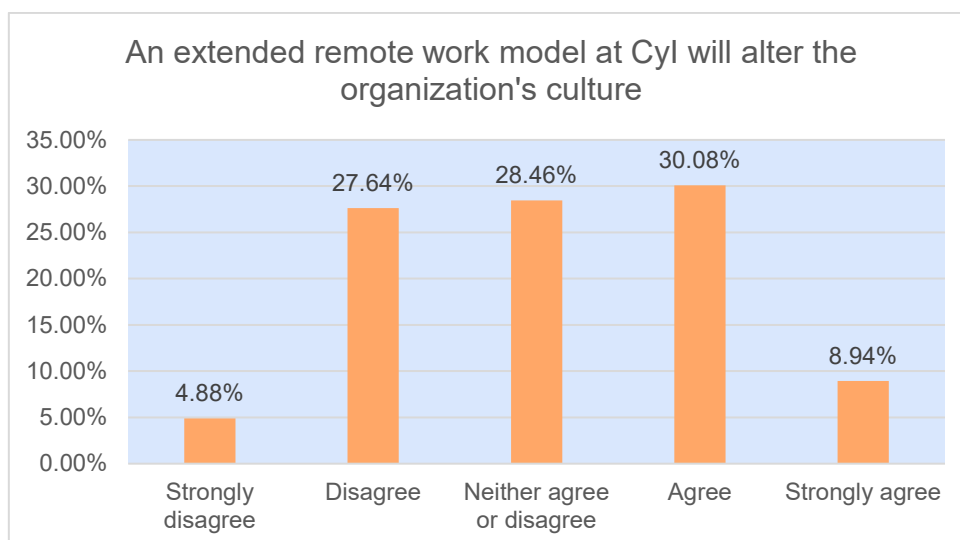


Figure 15: Impact of remote work on Cyl culture

The perceptions of the participants in relation to possible impacts of remote work on the performance of employees are illustrated in figure 16. The large majority of replies (69%) are not agreeing that remote work cannot sustain consistent high performance. With almost two years of experience of various levels of remote work, at times very extensive due to the pandemic related government regulations on presence at workplace, the participants seem to be confident that they can produce and maintain high performance. With the respective agreeable replies for an impact on the performance, and impossibility of sustaining it, at only 15% the dominant perception is that this is not a significant issue. This result also fits the pattern of the positive attitude and perception for remote work.

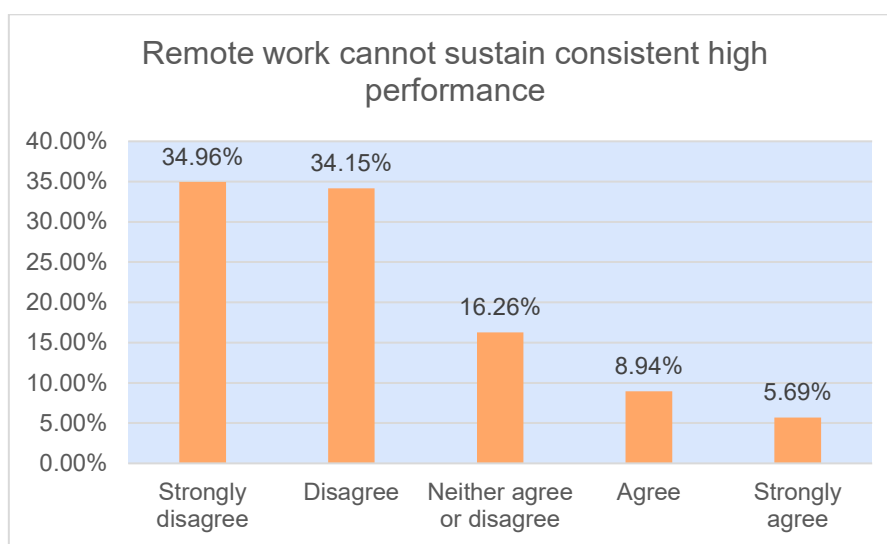


Figure 16: Impact of remote work on consistent high performance

Finally, the participants in the survey were asked to state how often they would want to work remotely after the pandemic is no longer a concern. The most popular choice was 2 days a week working remotely with 28%, followed by 3 days a week with 23% and 1 day a week with 19%. Less popular choices are those choosing a full remote model with 8% and a full return to the office with 9%. No strong pattern in terms of choices is emerging from the overall replies. However, this is again consistent with the acceptance of the necessity of a permanent remote work model after the pandemic is over.

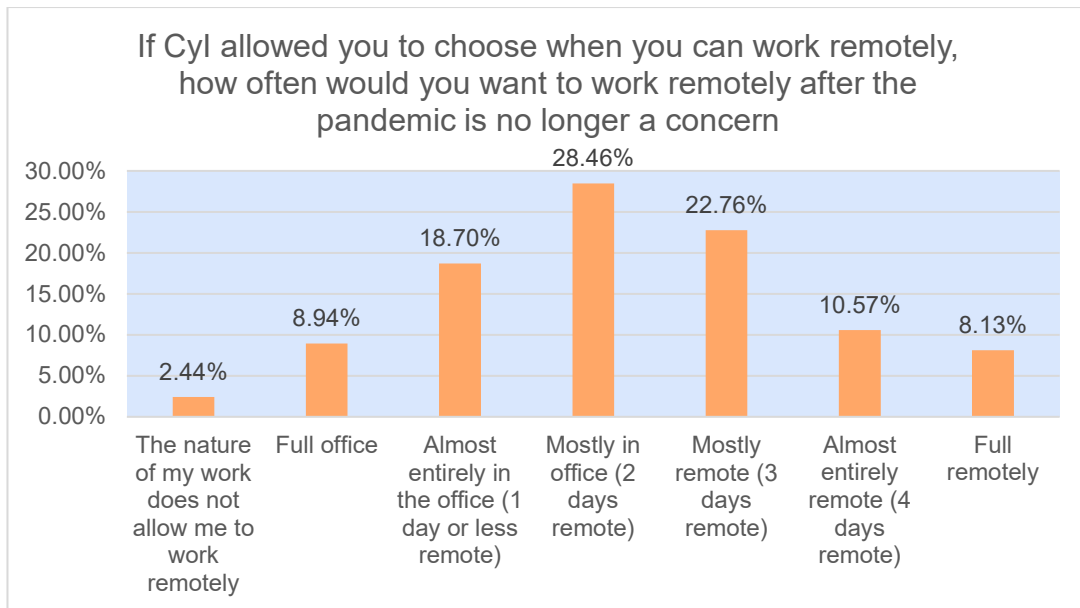


Figure 17: Frequency of remote work preference

4.4 Experiences for remote working from home

The second part of the questionnaire focuses on the experiences and challenges of employees when working from home. Any virtual work model entails to a certain extent work from home. This section attempts to not only identify whether the respondents are positive regarding the prospect of continuing to partly work from home, but also to identify the related challenges. The included statements were the following:

Statement 1: When I work from home I can collaborate with colleagues as effectively as when I am physically present.

Statement 2: While working remotely, I have timely access to my manager or others when needed to get my job done well.

Statement 3: While working remotely, I have a space where I can focus on work.

Statement 4: I feel well supported by my manager when working from home.

Statement 5: I am just as productive while working remotely when compared to my usual work location.

Statement 6: I am actually more productive with a flexible work schedule.

Statement 7: My home is a difficult place to be productive.

Statement 8: I feel disengaged from my work when I work from home.

Statement 9: I feel more burned out by work when I work from home.

Statement 10: Which of the challenges related to remote working are more relevant to you:

- Distractions at home
- Lack of appropriate tools
- Childcare
- Anxiety
- Physical workspace
- Communication with colleagues
- Connectivity
- Social isolation
- Maintaining a regular schedule
- I don't face any challenge

The results of the first question of the section regarding collaboration are captured in figure 18. The confidence on remote work model continues. The majority of the participants are in agreement that their collaboration with colleagues can be as effective as when they are physically present (62%). It is worth noting that over 29% of the respondents stated their strong agreement. The disagreement levels are relatively low with approximately a combined 25%.

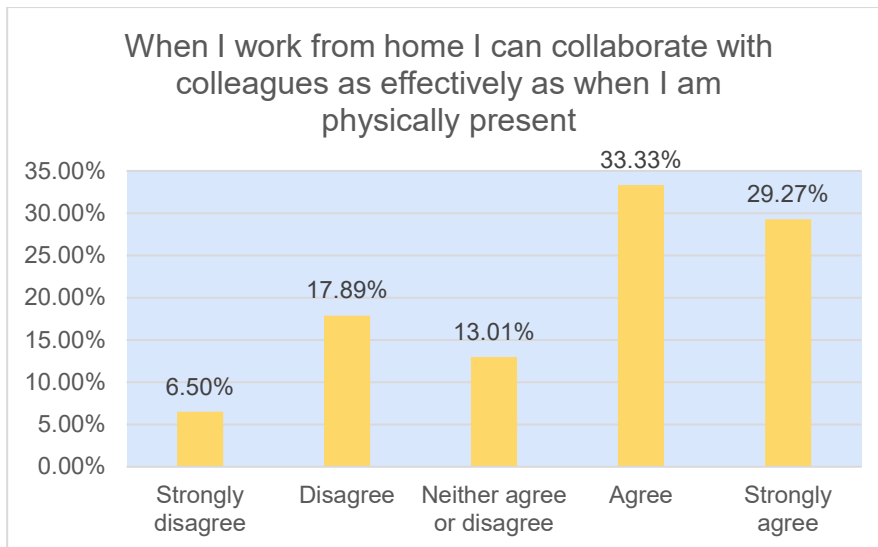


Figure 18: Effective collaboration when working from home

The positive attitude towards line managers follows in this section. The participants agreed with the very significant majority of 73% that they have timely access to their line managers while working from home to have the ability to perform well. Only 9% disagreed with the statement.

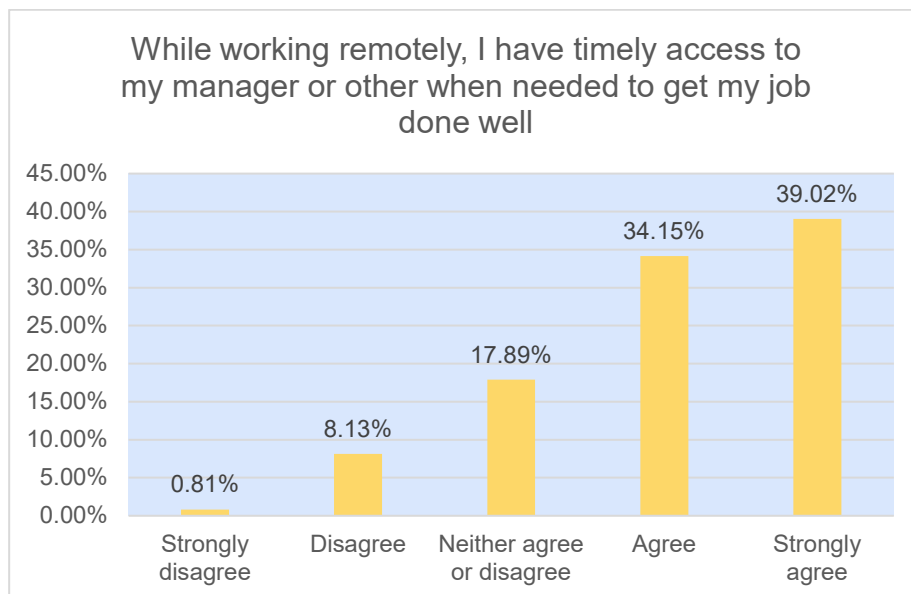


Figure 19: Timely access to managers while working from home

An even stronger belief in the line managers is the result regarding their overall support when the employee is working from home. Approximately 80% of the respondents are agreeable with the statement while the disagreeable level is at 7% (figure 20).

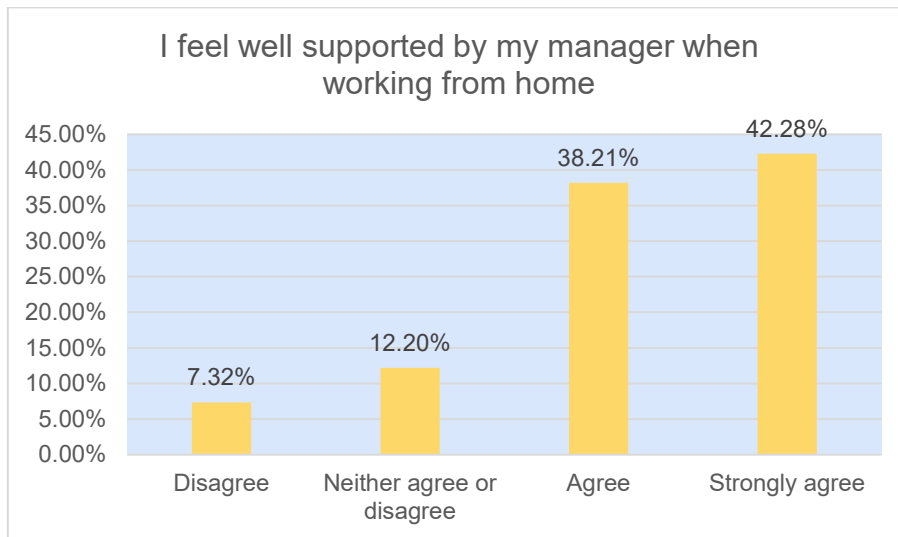


Figure 20: Support by manager when working from home

Another important parameter affecting remote work is the availability of proper work space at the employees living space. This should not be taken as a certainty especially given the overall relatively low age average of Cyl employees who tend to have smaller living spaces and young families. Despite this, the strong perception is that they have the required space to focus on their work. A majority of 70% agreed with the statement while the corresponding disagreement number was only 13% (figure 21).

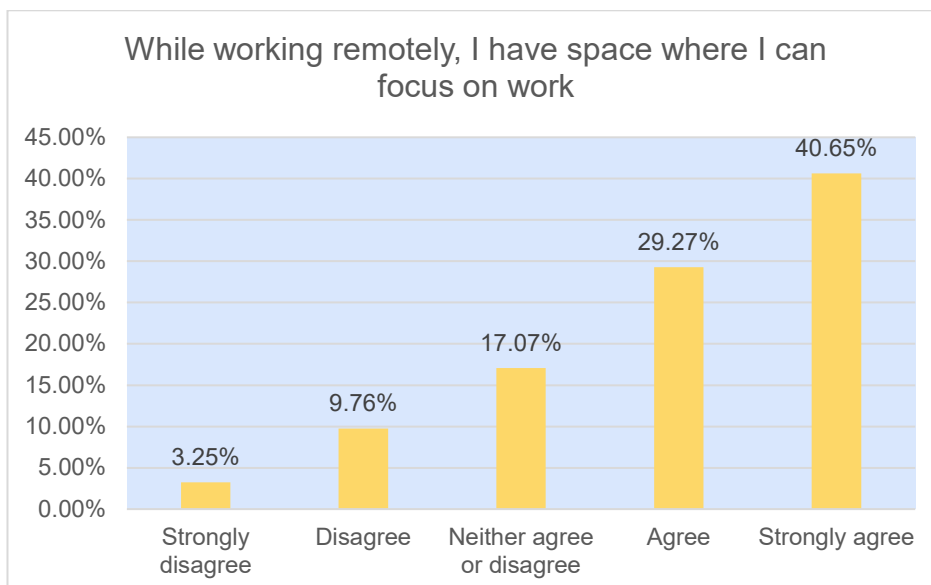


Figure 21: Availability of comfortable space for remote work

Figure 22 presents the results of the question regarding the ability to remain equally productive while working from home compared with the usual work location. The results mirror to an extent the result of the performance related question, with a slightly lower percentage. The majority of the respondents (61%) agreed that they can keep their productivity irrespective of the location. The highest percentage of 31% is for those who strongly agree. The neutral option's percentage is unexpectedly high with 21% while the combined disagreement number is at 18%. The individuals in the sample indicate a rather strong confidence that their productivity and performance will not be affected when allowed or asked to work remotely.

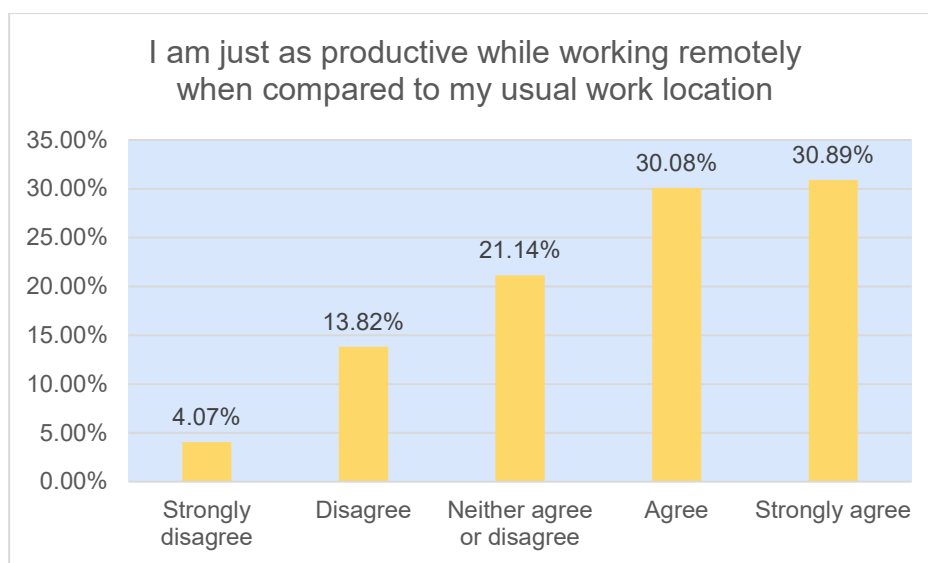


Figure 22: Remote work and productivity

An even stronger indication for the confidence of the respondents regarding remote work is the result of their answer whether they are actually more productive with a flexible work schedule. A large majority of 76% agreed with the statement, 47% of them strongly. The disagreement level remains very low with a combined 7%.

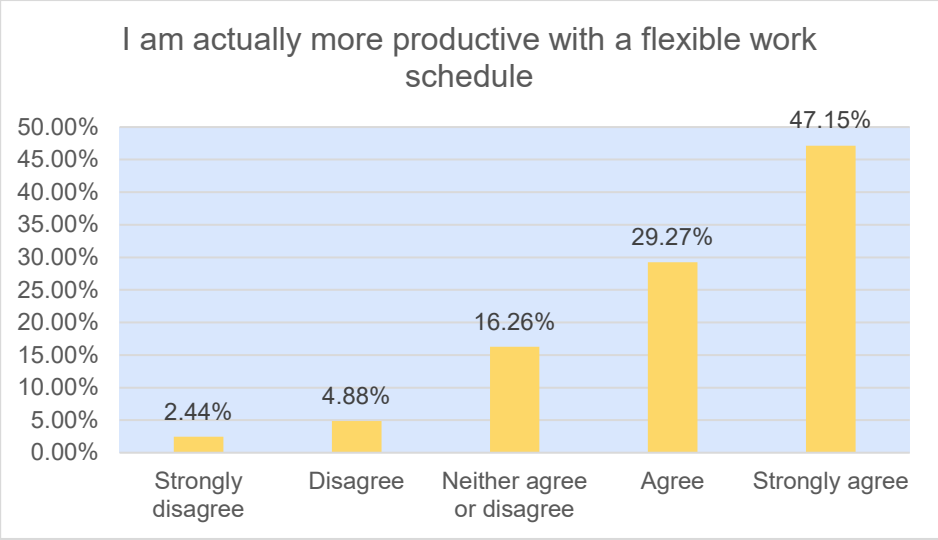


Figure 23: Flexibility and productivity

For internal reliability purposes the productivity statement was again posed in a slightly different way: My home is a difficult place to be productive. The responses as illustrated in figure 24 are similar with the results in figure 22. Again the large majority of respondents, 70%, disagree that their home is a difficult place while only 18% agree with the statement.

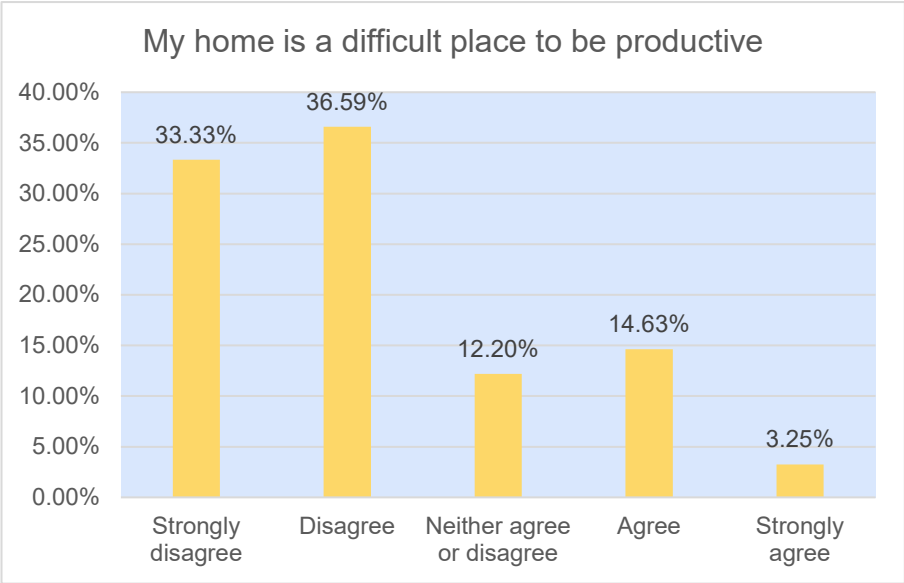


Figure 24: Flexibility and productivity

Disengagement is a factor that could possibly affect the productivity and performance of employees. Given the observed pattern in the responses, a high level of agreement with

the statement would have questioned the reliability of the result. However, the pattern continues in this statement with a majority of 68% not agreeing while only 15% feel that work from home makes them disengaged.

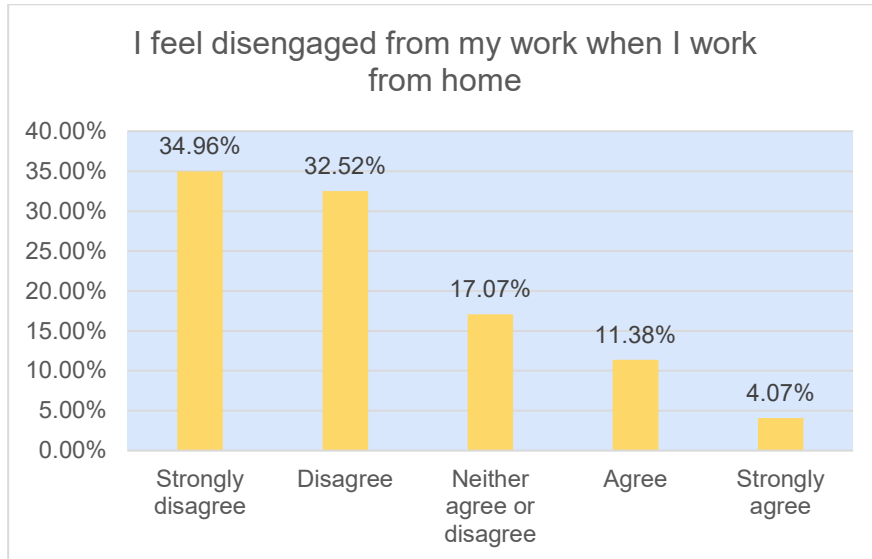


Figure 25: Work from home and disengagement

Similarly, only a small percentage of the participants are feeling that they are more burned out by work when working from home (14%). The most popular choice was strong disagreement with 33% followed by disagreement with 29%.

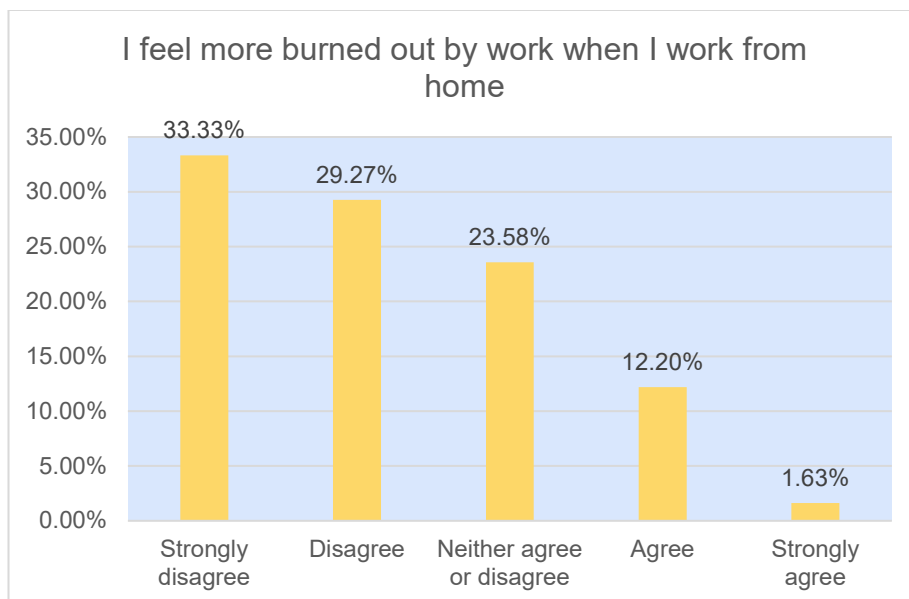


Figure 26: Burn out risk when working from home

The final statement of this section of the questionnaire asked the respondents to choose between various statements describing challenges that work from home entails, as identified in the literature. Chart 27 presents the results in absolute numbers and not percentages as participants were allowed to choose several answers without any limitation. There are at least two noteworthy observations. The most important finding is that the reply chosen more with 57 selections was the one on challenges posed by social isolation. The second most popular selection was that the respondents did not face any challenges at all. It should be noted that for this 34 out of the 35 selections were single selections of the choice. Again, the answers do not diverge from the already emerged overall pattern of the survey. Despite the expected significant numbers for challenges in communication with colleagues (it is assumed that this is related with the lack of face to face interaction) and the general distractions at home, the rest of the choices remain in low numbers. The participants consistently reveal that the dominant perception is that telework was successfully implemented and the employees' homes, despite some expected hindrances, allow for seamless continuation of all activities and operations.

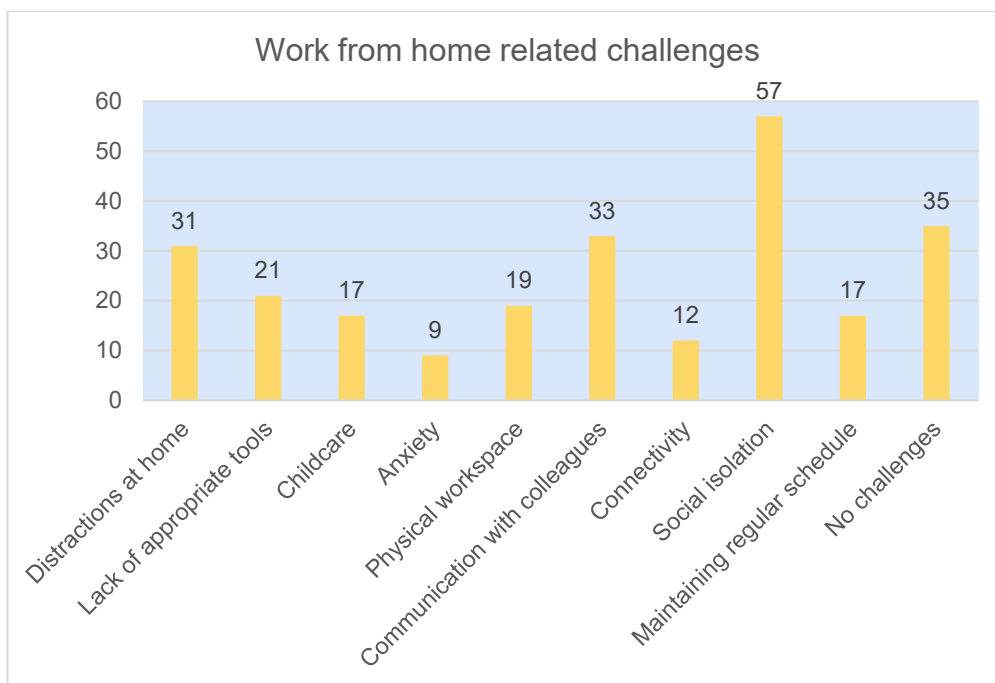


Figure 27: Challenges when working from home

4.5 Health, Safety and Well-being

It is by now well established in the literature that the COVID-19 crisis has meaningfully impacted the way people work and the way they perceive how a post-pandemic work environment should look like. What is the actual and perceived long lasting impact of the pandemic on the employees' well-being and what is the responsibility of the employer? This part of the study and the questionnaire aimed to capture the opinion and perceptions of the CyI employees regarding the relation between the pandemic and their overall health and their perception on what the employer is doing about it. The included statements were the following:

Statement 1: Actions and practices implemented during the pandemic demonstrate that employee health and safety are a top priority for CyI.

Statement 2: I am concerned that COVID will have a long-lasting impact on my personal and professional life.

Statement 3: CyI offers adequate support and services to address my psychological and mental health needs now and I am confident it will continue to do so beyond the pandemic.

Statement 4: I feel supported by the organization when I am dealing with personal and family issues.

Statement 5: CyI has the processes to intervene in case an employee seems distressed.

Statement 6: Since the pandemic started, I have not felt pressured to compromise good safety practices in order to do my job.

The first statement of this section of the questionnaire aimed to establish the level of confidence and satisfaction of the CyI employees in terms of how adequately the employer handled the pandemic and if the employees' health and safety was a top priority. The results are overwhelmingly positive. As presented in figure 28, 82% of the

participants were agreeable that health and safety of the staff was a top priority for Cyl, while only 7% expressed a level of disagreement.

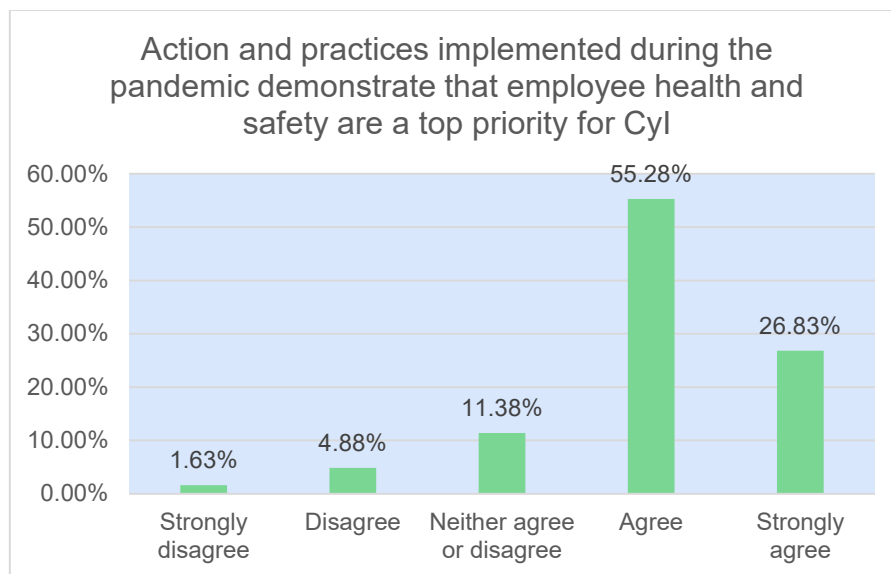


Figure 28: Cyl setting employee health and safety as a top priority

The level of concern regarding the long lasting impact of COVID-19 was a very important part of the questionnaire design. The results, as presented in figure 29, are of particular interest for further analysis and investigation. The unusually high percentage of 'neither agree or disagree' option is by itself an indication of uncertainty in the perception on the matter (31%). In addition, a significant percentage of 34% of the participants agreed with the statement. A slightly larger percentage of 36% disagreed. The results should be analysed through the lens of the significance of this particular theme. Even if there is no overwhelming majority regarding the concern, and the results are overall balanced between replies, further attempts for interpretation would help in addressing the matter for identifying the causes and planning for possible remedies.

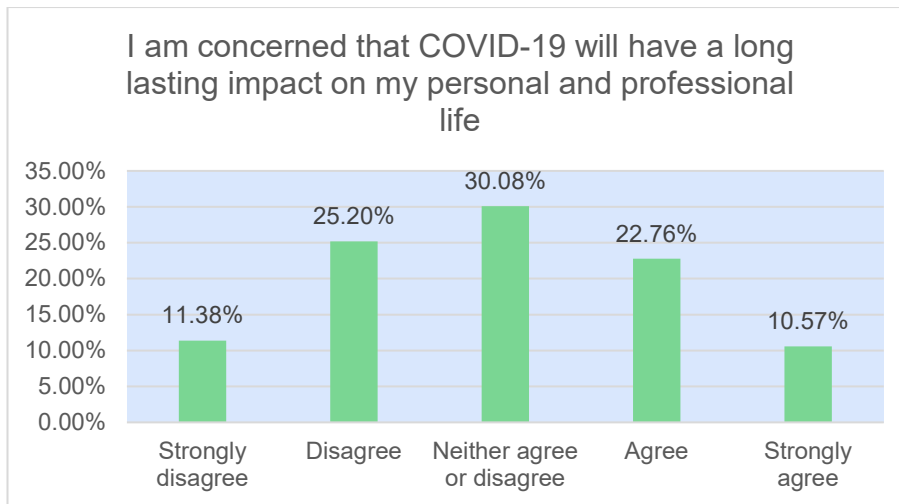


Figure 29: Concern about long lasting impact of COVID-19

Another important information for the employer is whether its employees are satisfied with the support they receive for addressing their psychological and mental health needs. The relative lack of confidence, as indicated by the results, poses questions in terms of the support needed, the adequacy of the provisions and in terms of the understanding of employees regarding what is on offer. Again, even more than the previous statement, the neutral option appears very high at 45% (figure 30). Those who are not satisfied or confident are only at 18%. However, the 37% of those who are satisfied with the support and services of CyI could not be considered as a satisfactory employee perception from the employer's perspective.

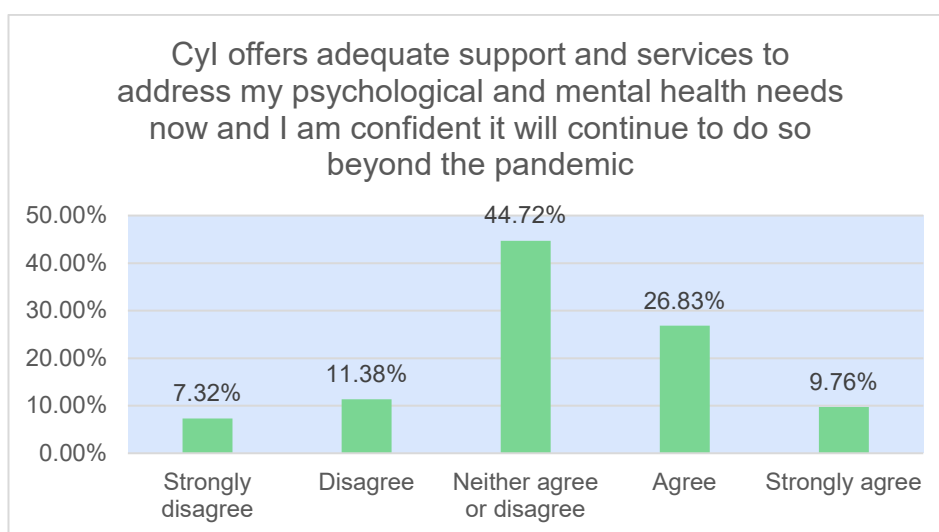


Figure 30: Adequate mental health support by employer

Employees are to a good degree satisfied with the overall support of CyI when dealing with personal and family issues. A majority of 55% are in agreement with the statement (figure 31). In one more question in this section the neutral option is at a high level with 33%. The combined disagreement levels are at 13%, a good indicator for the employer that its employees are confident for the support and understanding they receive in case of personal emergencies.

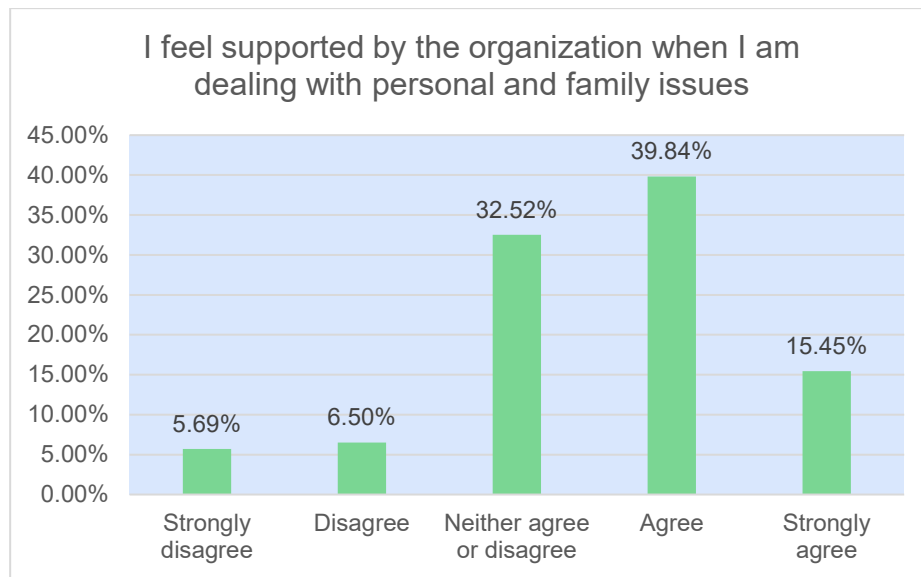


Figure 31: Organizational support when dealing with personal issues

The ability of the employer to intervene in the case of employees feeling distressed is the next question regarding mental health presented in figure 32. Given the lack of formal procedures or any other known practices at CyI, it is understandable why the 'neither agree or disagree' option is approximately 47%. The combined agreement answers were at 28% while the corresponding disagreement number was 25%. The result could be analysed more in an attempt to understand the high neutral percentage which in this case is the factor which will define better the dominant perception.

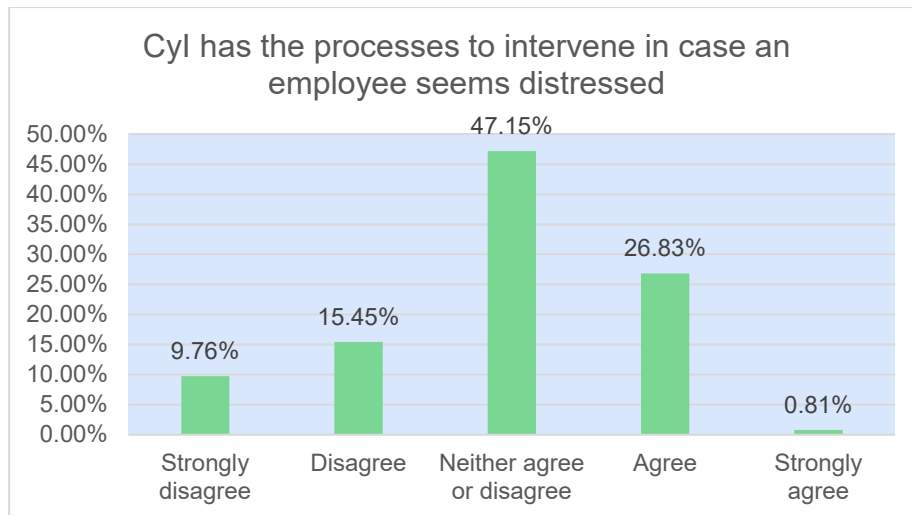


Figure 32: Employer’s ability for intervention in case of a distressed employee

The final question of the section aimed to see if any employee felt pressurized to compromise good safety practices in order to perform work responsibilities since the pandemic started. It is important to further understand why a combined 17% disagreed with the statement that they were not pressured (figure 33). It is a relatively low percentage but for such an important issue no matter the percentage, is a matter of concern and further investigation. The majority of the respondents agreed with the statement (61%).

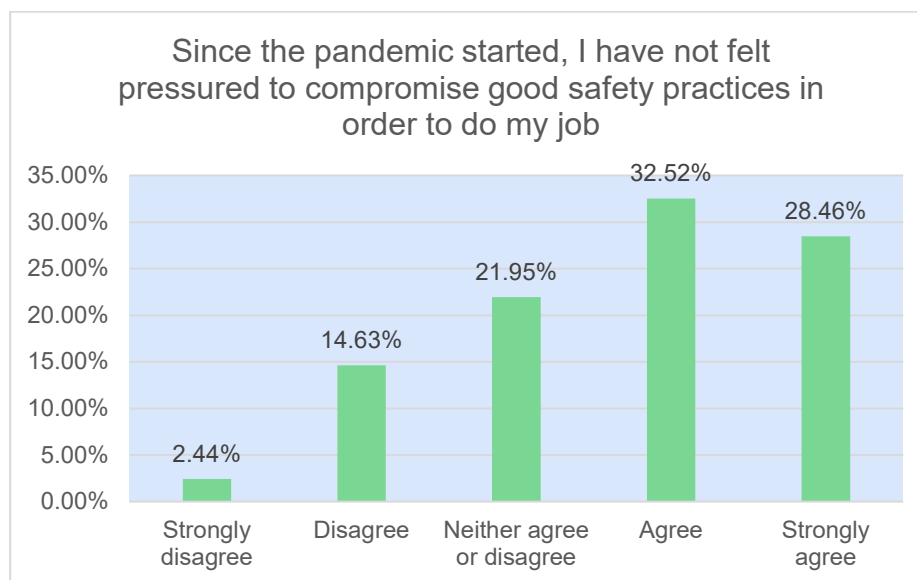


Figure 33: Pressure to compromise good safety

4.6 Post-pandemic office spaces

As discussed in the literature review chapter, the planning for work-spaces, their design and the utilization of office spaces in general will not be the same after the pandemic. The aim of the corresponding questionnaire section on office spaces was to identify the perceptions of employees regarding their ideal office arrangements and the perception of their needs for future office developments. This section's statements were the following:

Statement 1: I will feel comfortable with open plan office arrangements.

Statement 2: I will feel comfortable to work in a shared office space with CyI colleagues.

Statement 3: I will feel more comfortable to socialize at work in outdoor spaces in comparison with indoor spaces.

Statement 4: Investments should be made for more outdoor functional spaces.

Statement 5: For better space utilization I will be comfortable with unassigned seating in the office and the use of space booking applications.

A more detailed analysis of the results regarding office space will follow in the next chapter. For better understanding of the below commentary, some more information is needed for the general office space arrangements at CyI. Most office spaces are shared between employees and single occupancy offices are usually reserved for more senior personnel. The intention, known to employees, was to further develop the office infrastructure with open plan office arrangements in order to maximize occupancy of spaces given the relatively limited capabilities for expansion. The preferences and perceptions of employees on the particular topic is essential for the strategic planning of the on-going and future building infrastructure of the organization.

The first question of this section of the questionnaire addressed the matter in question: open plan office arrangements. The results as presented in figure 34 are revealing for the

preferences of the respondents. Over 28% of them strongly disagreed with the statement that they will be comfortable with open plan offices. In total 49% of the participants disagreed with the concept. The combined positive responses were at 33%, which is still a significant percentage. A first quick conclusion is that before proceeding with further designs for open plan offices, the concept should be reviewed through the lens of the employees and what they consider as a safe and comfortable space to work in. Feedback should be requested from the employees. Further interpretations and correlations are analysed in the following chapter.

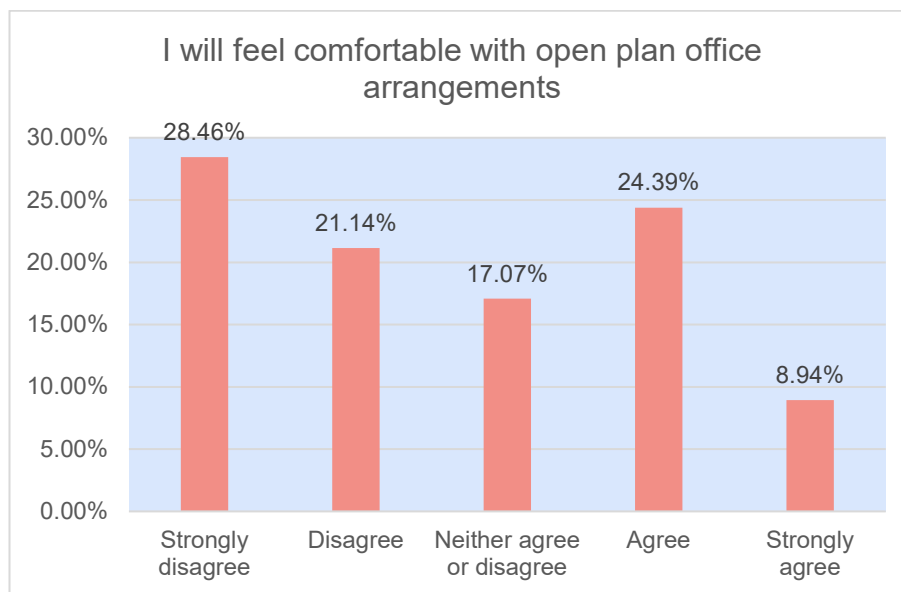


Figure 34: Perceptions on open plan office arrangements

The results regarding the limited office sharing are more in line with current practices at Cyl. The majority of the participants are stating that they are comfortable with sharing office spaces with colleagues (combined 51% as presented in figure 35). The percentage of those who do not feel comfortable is not negligible with a combined 32%, an arguably direct impact of the pandemic on office sharing perceptions.

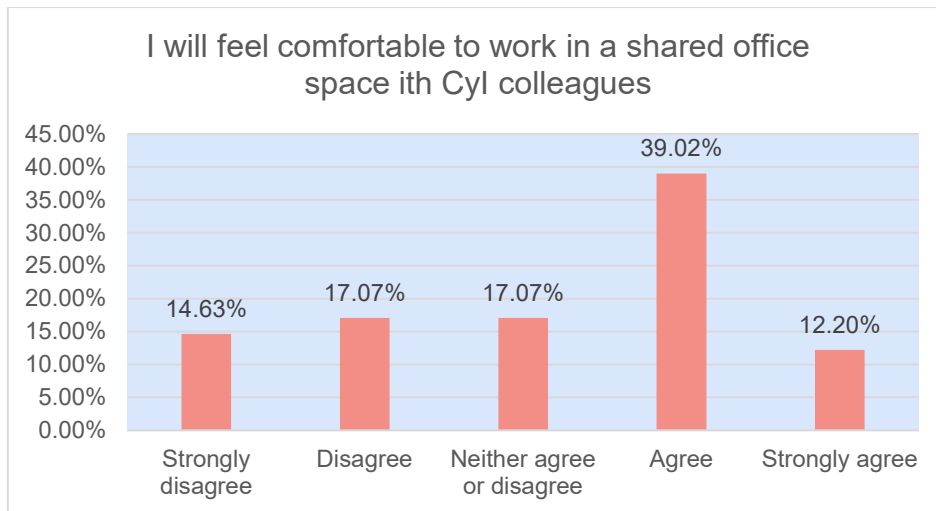


Figure 35: Perceptions on sharing office space

The results in figure 36 represent the preferences for unassigned seating in office space. They further reinforce the emerging pattern regarding the perceptions of the future office space at CyI. A majority of 63% disagree with this notion (33% of them strongly). Only 15% agreed with the possibility of having unassigned seating. Hot-desking should be not be considered as a viable future option for the organization, at least at this time.

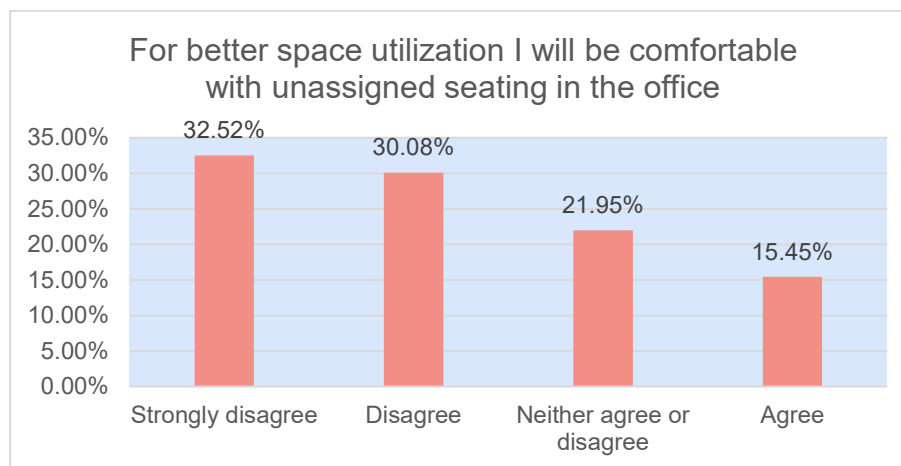


Figure 36: Perceptions on unassigned seating in the office

An interesting insight in the preferences of employees for the use of spaces is the result of the question whether they will feel comfortable to socialize at work in outdoor spaces in comparison with indoor spaces. The majority of the participants, as presented in figure 37 had a preference for outdoor spaces (59%). Only 16% responded that they disagree with the statement. It is evident that given the opportunities of the good Cyprus climate

for outside gatherings and activities, COVID has further enhanced the idea that choosing outdoor spaces is the preferred option.

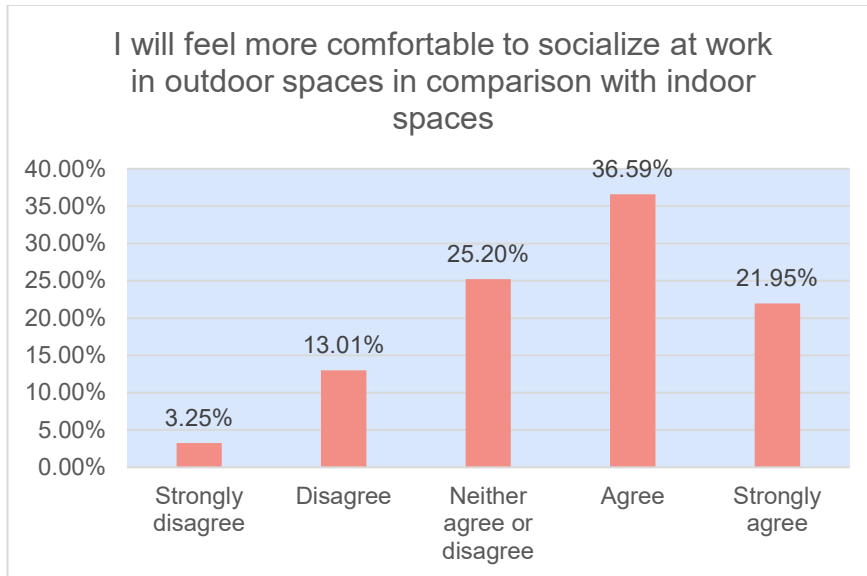


Figure 37: Preferences on indoor or outdoor spaces for socializing

In the final question of the section participants were asked to express their opinion on whether investments should be made for more outdoor functional spaces. The strong majority of 71% agreed with the statement, while the disagreement was at the very low percentage of 4% (figure 38). The message for investments in outdoor functional spaces is loud and clear.

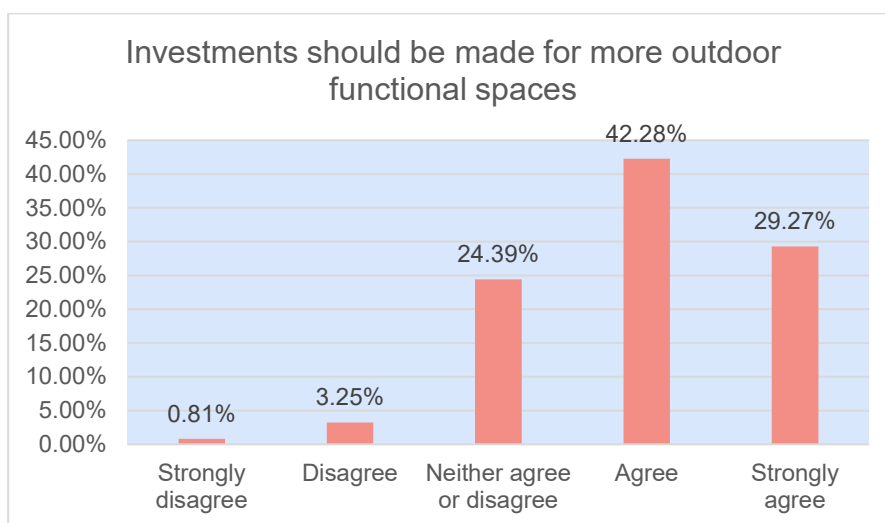


Figure 38: Investments on outdoor functional spaces

Chapter 5

Analysis and discussion

The following chapter focuses on further analysis and discussion on the most important findings of the study, as presented in chapter 4. The analysis will connect the findings with relevant information and results from the literature and other sources and will attempt to provide specific answers to the research questions posed earlier. A set of recommendations for each area is also presented, as it is judged that such information could be utilized by the management of the Cyprus Institute.

5.1 Remote Work

The aim of the first research question of the dissertation was to identify perceptions and beliefs on hybrid work models, especially in relation to potential extensive use of telework. The responses were consistent through the section following a very specific positive pattern regarding the implementation of a robust hybrid work model. The first number that really stood out was that 73% replied that they would view positively, where applicable, the possibility for fully switching to remote work. This very high number not only indicates the apparent successful remote work experience over the course of the pandemic but also the perception that this model can successfully continue to be the model applied at the organization. Similarly, and with almost the same percentage, the 72% of the participants rejected the concept of returning to the pre-pandemic mode in which flexibility was the norm but without a remote work policy, or practice for that matter. This trend follows the pattern of international employee surveys with similar goals. The extended US Remote Work Survey (PWC, 2021) among others concluded that remote work during the pandemic was an overwhelming success.

An exceptional number of the results was that 86% of the participants agreed that their preferred mode of hybrid work would be a flexible system in which schedules are defined with the line managers. It should be noted that this approach was the one followed since the start of the pandemic and the compulsory implementation of remote work, based on relevant governmental decrees. The positive perceptions regarding hybrid work continued in regard to two other vital components for the success of such a model. Approximately 70% of the respondents disagreed with the concept that remote work cannot sustain high performance. Over 50% of the participants were in agreement that line managers can adopt and lead their teams successfully, a result consistent with the argument that leadership could be effective from a distance (Antonakis & Atwater, 2002).

The preference for remote work is compatible with the argumentation of Allen, Cho & Meier (2014), stating that duties requiring a high degree of concentration without the immediate need for interaction would prefer remote work. Undoubtedly, both Institute researchers (the majority of the researchers are conducting lab based research, but for a substantial part of them, presence at the lab is not necessary on a daily basis) or administrators, to productively work they require a high level of concentration.

Telework was introduced at the Institute in an effort to keep the personnel safe while ensuring that core operation continues. The existing adequate information technology infrastructures for such an effort existed. The employees did not really have any prior experience in teleworking, at least not in such a structured framework and for extended periods of time. The results of this study indicate that the transition was done successfully and without major challenges. It is also quite clear that there is a strong preference for the continuation of this model. Another follow up survey will also serve as a useful tool, as information on changing perceptions is needed, especially as we move away from the period of strict restrictions and compulsory remote work. Additionally, the extent of telework will depend on the evaluation by the organization of its impact on productivity.

An area with uncertain results and numbers is the perceived impact of remote work on the organizational culture. Despite the overall very positive perceptions on remote work, there was no agreement or majority of replies on the consequences on the organizational culture of the Institute. The 28% of the participants remained neutral, 39% agreed that

remote work will alter the culture, while 33% disagreed. With the shift towards telework and virtual interactions there are concerns that organizations will not be able to maintain their culture. The Return to Workplace survey of Deloitte US (2021) identified that the main concern of companies for the future while following hybrid work models is how to maintain the company culture. This concern comes ahead of other important factors such as maintaining high performance and collaborating effectively. While remote work models and virtual work environments enhance flexibility, and as a consequence many times productivity, they impose serious challenges associated with the organizational culture and values (Asatiani *et al*, 2021). It is apparent that this risk is well understood by many of the Institute's employees.

There was no consensus regarding the optimal balance between work days with physical presence and work days away from the office. The most popular choices were 2 days a week working remotely with 28% followed by 3 days with 23%. In total 70% of the participants would prefer to work remotely at least 3 days a week. This number is high compared with international standards, as a recent PWC (2021) survey concluded that about 55% of the employees would prefer the remote model for at least 3 days a week. Based on the same PWC survey, almost 70% of the executives believe that employees should be at the organization's premises at least 3 days a week to be able to maintain a distinct company culture. Balancing the optimal number of days to be allowed will not be an easy task for any organization. Based on the study results the main preference between the Institute's employees is for at least 2 remote work days a week. The employer needs to carefully assess if this is the optimal number.

5.2 Work from Home Experience

The second research question of the study was regarding the experiences and challenges of the employees when working from home. Work from home is a form of remote work of course, and the most preferred form for that matter, but not the only one. Home environment and family could pose significant challenges in the successful implementation of a remote work model. Through the questionnaire the study attempted to identify specific challenges and problems on a variety of areas including practical

issues and space, mental health, technologies and productivity. The general answer to the research question is that employees at the Cyprus Institute do not face any major challenges (at least the significant majority of them) and their perceptions of their overall work from home experience are positive.

More specifically, over 60% of the participants agreed that they collaborate with their colleagues equally effectively and over 80% felt well supported by their line managers when working from home. No major practical or physical hindrances were identified and employees to a great extent stated that they could actually be more productive with such flexible work arrangements (over 75% agreed). In terms of issues related with mental health the responses that were positive on the risks remained at relatively low numbers and no high number of major concerns was observed. However, for such issues, even small percentages should be taken into account and need to be better understood. The perception of approximately 15% of the participants was that when they work from home there is an increased risk for disengagement from work and an increased risk for feeling burned out. This is consistent with research that was done during the pandemic and job burnout when working from home was a key finding (Kniffin *et al*, 2021). Increased burned out feelings among workers were also found in a survey of the American Psychological Association (2021), with considerably higher rates than the percentages of this study. This is a good indication; however, the organization still needs to investigate more and possibly plan an intervention program for those affected.

A particularly revealing part of the survey was the outcome of the attempt to identify perceived challenges when employees are working from home. Participants were asked to choose between several options without any particular maximum number of choices. This perhaps could have been a study limitation as most of the respondents chose several options and thus it is difficult to assert what was most impactful on them. Despite this, the information gathered provide important insights in the perceptions of employees.

Two numbers truly stand out (for the discussion and interpretation of the results we will be referring to percentages, but it is noted that the percentages are not cumulative): 46% identified social isolation as a major challenge for them while working from home. This is an alarming message for the employer, especially if remote work will be a dominant

way of operating in the months and years to come. It has been already pointed out that being socially distant and lonely could lead to decreased job commitment and decreased job performance (Ozcelik & Barsade, 2018). It should be noted, though, that despite the fact that the survey was conducted at a time relatively distant from the lockdowns (but not from other more minor restrictions), the psychological impact of the extended period of the crisis and the extreme isolation in many instances, are still relatively very close. It should be expected than in more normal times people would be able to handle social isolation better when working from home. This should be seriously considered in the future planning of a remote work policy for the organization. The second number actually highlights a much more positive message: 28% stated that they face no challenge at all when working from home. For staff with limited to no relevant experience, this is a quite high percentage and an indication on which the management can meaningfully built its remote work strategy.

Similar recent research indicates that the main benefits of remote work was the increased flexibility, work-life balance and job performance, while major hindrances were mainly the social aspects such as lost comradery and isolation (Babapour *et al*, 2022). The results are extremely similar with the conclusions of this dissertation.

Hybrid work appears to be perceived as the best solution for going forward for both employer and employees. For maximizing the desired benefits for all the employer is expected to provide the necessary support and flexibility for the re-shaping of the physical and digital workplaces of the Cyprus Institute to fit the newly established needs of the employees.

5.3 Health and Well-being

The health and well-being of employees was always a serious matter. The pandemic and its impact on workers reminded all employers that such issues should always be on the top of their agendas. The third research question was about the perceptions of the employees regarding the impact of the pandemic on the work and personal life and their employers' responses and focus on their health, safety and well-being needs. The overall

responses are somewhat alarming, despite the very strong number of 82% of the participants agreeing that the Cyprus Institute's actions and practices during the pandemic demonstrated that health and safety of the personnel is a top priority for the organization. Most importantly, the perception of 34% of the participants is that COVID-19 will have a long lasting impact on their personal and professional lives. This number combined with the high percentage of 31% of people remaining uncertain about what will happen creates many questions. What are the perceived impacts? Are people scared about their job security and financial capabilities? Are people stressed about how to cope with the new way of operation of the organization after the pandemic? This is a serious matter for further investigation. Feelings of insecurity or being scared for possible job loss in organizations during these precarious times is a common theme in recent literature (Koh & Goh, 2020).

Other alarming findings concern the satisfaction of employees in terms of the support they receive regarding their psychological and mental health needs. 45% of the respondents chose the neutral choice, something that could certainly have a meaning by itself. Another 18% essentially state that they are not happy with what is on offer. Are these replies a product of lack of information regarding what the employer can offer or do they show a perception that the employer is not caring enough for such issues? Either way, this is another important matter needing further investigation and understanding. Another set of responses follows a similar pattern: it seems that employees are also uncertain about the ability of the Institute to intervene in case of somebody is feeling distressed. 47% of the participants did not agree or disagree and 25% disagreed that the employer has the ability to intervene. It is a fact that there is no formal policy or procedure for such a case. However, this perception raises some questions regarding the trust of employees towards the employer. Finally another serious issue brought up was the possible pressure for compromising good safety practices in order to perform job responsibilities. Given the excellent track record of the Institute on health and safety issues it is surprising that 17% of the respondents felt that they were pressurized at some point to do something which was perceived as compromising their safety. It is definitely a matter that can truly compromise the organization and the management should carefully try to identify the cause. It is noted that this outcome could be possibly

interpreted through the lens of recent findings of research conducted in organizations of similar relatively small size, which concluded that well-being of employees and their trust on health and safety practices could decline (Brown *et al*, 2021) after the pandemic.

5.4 Office spaces

The final research question of the dissertation concerned the perceptions and beliefs of the employees regarding preferred set-ups and designs for the post-pandemic office spaces. The pandemic has altered the relationship of employees with office spaces. The premises of an organization are not seen any more as the necessary place to be a productive and high performer worker. Employees are currently viewing office spaces more pragmatically, as they have substantial experience in remote work, acquired forcibly during the lockdowns, and know that they can conduct their daily routines, work tasks, team meetings and any collaborations, on line. Currently, the large majority of the Institute's employees are either in shared office spaces (2 to 4 individuals) or in larger open plan spaces. Is this approach still a trusted one? Do the employees of the Institute still feel safe or comfortable to operate in spaces with this particular setup? The results of the study have shed light in these questions.

Approximately half of the participants stated that they do not feel comfortable to work in open plan spaces. This is actually a global trend following the pandemic crisis. Prior to COVID-19 open plan offices were popular with employers and office designers. Recent research indicates though that after COVID-19 workers are at least nervous to return to such open plan arrangements with the risk of overcrowding, close proximity between desks and in general in an environment that the employee has no control (Samani *et al*, 2020a). Gensler's global workplace survey (2021) also showed that employees are indicating an increasing need for more access to private spaces. Similarly, the participants to a large extent reject the idea of unassigned seating (a majority of over 63%), essentially rejecting the concept of hot-desking. Hot-desking was a consideration for the organization, as in recent years lack of space is an issue. Given the perceptions of the employees and the almost certain impact on their psychology if an open plan scenario materializes, the Institute needs to very carefully consider its planning moves for space

re-arrangement and the design of new spaces. Experts suggest that the concept of shared office spaces and the open-plan work spaces should be re-thought with more focus on personal spaces, if such an approach could survive after the hard impact of the coronavirus (Samani, 2020a).

5.5 Research Limitations

A number of research limitations were known from the beginning. The responses and corresponding data are heavily influenced by the very recent stresses and pressures of the pandemic. This is a study that essentially attempts to address the preferred future of work as seen through the perspective of the Cyprus Institute employees. The identified risk is that these perceptions might change within the next months as people move gradually away from the COVID-related fears, the traumatic experience of lockdowns and the other negative real impacts on their daily life. The emerged patterns are a useful toolbox for immediate use but this should be done with caution. Another possible weakness is the way participants might have approached the electronic survey. Employees of the Institute are very often asked to participate in surveys for many operational or other purposes and this has created a certain level of discomfort. Usually very few of them respond or as a best case scenario they respond but they are not paying enough attention to what they are being asked to do. Thus, the possible limitation here, and despite the very good numbers of participation, is that respondents might have gone through the survey very quickly without allocating the necessary thought for accurately and truthfully record their beliefs. Another limitation is the lack of a more advanced statistical analysis of the data for identifying correlations with significance between the various variables captured by the survey. Such an analysis would have added an extra layer of analysis. Ideally, time permitting, the survey should have been followed up with a series of personal interviews for collecting qualitative data as well. Many of the results of the survey could be better understood and explained if they could be compared with such qualitative narratives.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

This dissertation attempted to shed light on the changing perceptions and perspectives of employees regarding the post pandemic preferred work modus operandi, including remote work and telework, the use and set up of spaces at work and the needed support for their well-being. The followed methodology was through a case study approach to allow for an in depth exploration of the complex issues under investigation in a real setting.

Virtual work models have already gained recognition and the extended lock downs during the pandemic forcibly tested them. Many international organizations have proven that is both feasible to follow such models without compromising quality or productivity. To a large extent, based on the perceptions of the employees, the case of the Cyprus Institute follows this pattern.

The results of the study indicate that the employees of the Institute are very positive both in terms of the experiences with remote work but also with the potential of telework for the future operation of the organization. The large majority perceives that the best way forward is for the organization to allow flexibility to internal research and administrative units to regulate their telework schedules. It should be noted that people are open even to the possibility for full remote work, but looking at the data carefully, it could be interpreted that most prefer a balanced approach between work from home and physical presence at the office. The majority of the survey participants have positive experiences with their line managers in terms of them being available and capable of supporting them in such a new regime. They are also confident that productivity or engagement are not affected by the lack of physical presence at the office. No major concerns were identified

in regard to the challenges when working from home. Social isolation was a dominant shared concern, but this goes beyond the actual performing of duties and responsibilities. Despite the fact that this was a new situation for the organization, it seems that people were able to adopt quickly and effectively. An interesting finding is the overall uncertainty of whether COVID would have a long lasting impact on their personal and professional lives. This is by itself a matter needing further investigation. It is crucial to understand more the employees' concerns. The overall perceptions of the employees regarding the organization's ability to support the mental health of its staff were positive. Important findings were identified regarding the perceptions for the future design and structure of office spaces. Essentially the survey participants were negative with the idea of using extensively open plan offices, hot-desking or unassigned shared office space.

Unquestionably, the pandemic has had major consequences and ramifications on many aspects of work life. The case of the Cyprus Institute illustrates that not all could be deemed as negative as the new reality presents opportunities for improvement. Employees seem to be extremely comfortable with the new teleworking arrangements. With the correct management of the situation in the near future employees could be more productive and satisfied than just return to old routines. Despite the challenges, work from home has several advantages such as the perceived control over the individual's work day, the enhanced efficiency and the avoidance of wasting time in commuting. Such variables should be taken into account in the planning process for any organization.

6.1 Future Research

The questions answered by this study are limited by design. There are multiple remaining related research avenues to explore. A very interesting finding of the study is the level of uncertainty in the perceptions of employees regarding the possible changes of organizational culture with the increased implementation of remote hybrid work arrangements. The impact of COVID-19 on how organizations view certain operational factors is clear. What requires more research is what would be the long lasting effects on organizational culture and values with real practical implications on how people will be recruited and trained.

It is obvious, based on the results of the study, that telework has gained the confidence of employees and a hybrid model of it is a preferred option. The results indicated strongly towards a good established virtual connection and supervision line between teams. The way the virtual monitoring could continue and what are the expectations and perceptions could be further investigated. In addition, another avenue for future research that could be explored is how creativity and innovation could be maintained with limited face to face interaction. The existing technologies allow not only seamless communication but also sophisticated ways to collaborate. Will this be enough to partly replace actual human interaction? Given the solid establishment of virtual work teams, it will be valuable to further investigate how innovative methodologies and approaches will better enable the functioning of such teams.

Appendix A

Survey Questionnaire

Reimagining work life after the pandemic: the Cyprus Institute (Cyl) case

Part 1 – Scope

Has the pandemic transformed the office life permanently? This questionnaire aims to identify the opinions and perceptions of the Cyprus Institute staff and PhD students regarding the possible long-lasting impact of the pandemic on the operation of the organization and the expectations on the future Cyl workplace. Does the organization need to re-evaluate and re-design the fundamentals of its workplace? The pandemic has given a unique opportunity for the re-thinking of not only the significance of presence and proximity in workplace planning, but also of the importance of enhanced hygiene and cleaning protocols. Operational practices, remote and hybrid work and the need for psychological support are other domains that the pandemic has directly impacted with real ramifications on how they should be viewed in the future.

Participation and Consent

Your participation is voluntary and anonymous (no personal data will be asked). The collected data will be used only for research purposes. The survey results will be presented to the Cyl management. A short summary report will be provided to all survey participants. The survey is being done for the purpose of a Master's Degree in Business Administration from the Faculty of Economics and Management of the Open University of Cyprus. The completion of the questionnaire takes around 10 minutes. Thank you so much for your valuable feedback!

Part 2 – Demographics

1. Gender
Male
Female
Neutral
2. Years at Cyl

- < 1 year —
- Over 1 to 3 years —
- 4 to 8 years —
- over 8 years —

- 3. Age range
 - ≤ 29 years —
 - 30 – 39 years —
 - 40 – 49 years —
 - ≥ 50 years —

- 4. Origin
 - Local —
 - International —

- 5. Staff category
 - PhD Student/Graduate Research Assistant —
 - Administrative/Research Support —
 - Research —
 - Faculty —

Part 3

Is Hybrid Work here to stay? What is your preference/opinion?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
	1	2	3	4	5
Specific personnel categories who are not required to be on-site for their responsibilities could work fully remotely					
Physical presence to be optional					
CyI should implement a hybrid model with rotation of days in office (staggered work hours or days)					
CyI should implement a hybrid model with extended flexibility to the employees to work from home when they agree with their line managers.					

Post pandemic we should fully return to on-site work with minor exceptions					
Line managers are sufficiently trained to adopt and lead their teams in the post pandemic work environment.					

If CyI allowed you to choose when you worked remotely, how often would you want to work remotely after the pandemic is no longer a concern?

- Full remotely
- Almost entirely remote (4 days remote)
- Mostly remote (3 days remote)
- Mostly in office (2 days remote)
- Almost entirely in the office (1 day or less remote)
- Full office
- The nature of my work does not allow me to work remotely

Part 4

Experiences and opinions for remote working from home

An extended remote work model at CyI will alter the organization's culture.					
Remote work cannot sustain consistent high performance.					
When I work from home I can collaborate with colleagues as effectively as when I am physically present.					
While working remotely, I have timely access to my manager or others when needed to get my job done well.					
While working remotely, I have a space where I can focus on work.					
I feel well supported by my manager when working from home.					
I can continue to work remotely indefinitely.					

I am just as productive while working remotely when compared to my usual work location.					
I am actually more productive with a flexible work schedule					
My home is a difficult place to be productive					
I feel disengaged from my work when I work from home					
I feel more burned out by work when I work from home					

Which of the challenges related to remote working are more relevant to you:

- Distractions at home
- Lack of appropriate tools
- Childcare
- Anxiety
- Physical workspace
- Communication with colleagues
- Connectivity
- Social isolation
- Maintaining a regular schedule
- No challenges

Part 5 Health, Safety and Well-being

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
	1	2	3	4	5
Actions and practices implemented during the pandemic demonstrate that employee health and safety are a top priority for Cyl.					
I feel confident that with respect to COVID-19 and other health matters in the future, my organization will take appropriate steps to protect my safety at work.					

I am concerned that COVID will have a long-lasting impact on my personal and professional life.					
CyI offers adequate support and services to address my psychological and mental health needs now and I am confident it will continue to do so beyond the pandemic.					
I feel supported by the organization when I am dealing with personal and family issues.					
CyI has the processes to intervene in case an employee seems distressed.					
Since the pandemic started, I have not felt pressured to compromise good safety practices in order to do my job.					

Part 6
Rethinking office spaces post pandemic

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
	1	2	3	4	5
I will feel comfortable with open plan office arrangements.					
I will feel comfortable to work in a shared office space with CyI colleagues					
I will feel more comfortable to socialize at work in outdoor spaces in comparison with indoor spaces.					
Investments should be made for more outdoor functional spaces					

For better space utilization I will be comfortable with unassigned seating in the office and the use of space booking applications					
--	--	--	--	--	--

References

Allen, T. D., Cho, E., & Meier, L. L. (2014) 'Work-family boundary dynamics', *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 1, pp. 99 –121.

Allen, T. D., Golden, T. D., & Shockley, K. M. (2015) 'How effective is telecommuting? Assessing the status of our scientific findings', *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 16, pp. 40–68.

American Psychological Association (2021) '2021 Work and Well-being Survey', <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2022/01/special-burnout-stress>

Andrade, C. (2021) 'The Inconvenient Truth About Convenience and Purposive Samples', *Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine*, 43(1), pp. 86–88.

Belzunegui-Eraso, A. and Erro-Garcés A. (2020) 'Teleworking in the Context of the Covid-19 Crisis', *Sustainability*, 12(3662), p. 3662.

Antonakis, J., & Atwater, L. (2002) 'Leader distance: A review and a proposed theory', *The Leadership Quarterly*, 13, pp. 673–704.

Asatiani, A. *et al.* (2021) 'Constructing continuity across the organisational culture boundary in a highly virtual work environment', *Information Systems Journal*, 31(1), pp. 62–93.

Babapour Chafi, M., Hultberg, A. and Yams, N. B. (2022) 'Post-pandemic office work: Perceived challenges and opportunities for a sustainable work environment', *Sustainability*, 14(1).

Baldry, C. (1997) 'The Social Construction of Office Space', *International Labour Review*, 136(3), pp. 365–378.

Barclay, L. A., & York, K. M. (2001) 'Space at work: Exercises in the art of understanding physical indicators of culture', *Journal of Management Education*, 25(1), pp.54-69.

Brennan, A., Chugh, J.S., & Kline, T. (2002) 'Traditional versus open office design: A longitudinal field study', *Environment and Behavior*, 34(3), pp. 279-299.

Brooks, S. K. *et al.* (2020) 'The psychological impact of quarantine and how to reduce it: rapid review of the evidence', *The Lancet*, 395(10227), pp. 912–920.

Brown, E.C. *et al.* (2021) 'Total Worker Health® and Small Business Employee Perceptions of Health Climate, Safety Climate, and Well-Being during COVID-19', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(9702), p. 9702.

Cho, E. (2020) 'Examining boundaries to understand the impact of COVID-19 on vocational behaviors', *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 119.

Chudoba, K. M., Wynn, E., Lu, M., & Watson-Manheim, M. B. (2005). 'How virtual are we? Measuring and understanding its impact in a global organization', *Information Systems Journal*, 15(4), pp. 279–306.

Chung, H. (2018) 'Future of work and flexible working in Estonia: the case of Employee-Friendly flexibility'.
<https://www.riigikogu.ee/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Employee-friendly-flexibility.pdf>

Colenberg, S., Jylhä, T. and Arkesteijn, M. (2021) 'The relationship between interior office space and employee health and well-being – a literature review', *Building research and information*, 49(3), pp. 352–366.

Creswell, J. (2008) *Educational research: Planning, conducting and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Education Inc.

Crowe, S., Cresswell, K., Robertson, A., Huby, G., Avery, A., & Sheikh, A. (2011) 'The case study approach', *BMC medical research methodology*, 11, p. 100.

Deloitte (2021) 'Return to Workplace Survey'.
<https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/pages/human-capital/articles/2021-return-to-workplace-survey.html>

Elsbach, K.D. (2003) 'Relating physical environment to self-categorizations: identity threat and affirmation in a non-territorial office space', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 48(4), pp. 622-654.

Eurofound (2010) European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2010) 'Telework in the European Union'
<https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2010/telework-in-the-european-union>

Eurofound (2020) 'Living, working and COVID-19: First findings – April 2020'
<https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2020/living-working-and-covid-19-first-findings-april-2020>.

European Commission (2021) 'Science for Policy Briefs 2021: Telework in the EU before and after the COVID-19: where we were, where we head to'
https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/economics/telework-before-the-covid-19-pandemic_d5e42dd1-en

Galea S, Merchant RM, Lurie N. The Mental Health Consequences of COVID-19 and Physical Distancing: The Need for Prevention and Early Intervention. *JAMA Internal Medicine*. 2020; 180(6): 817–818.

Gensler Research Institute (2021) 'Global Workplace Survey' <https://www.gensler.com/gri/us-workplace-survey-winter-2021>

Griffiths, D. *et al.* (2022) 'Changes in work and health of Australians during the COVID-19 pandemic: a longitudinal cohort study', *BMC Public Health*, 22(1), pp. 1–9.

Huang Y, Zhao N. (2020) 'Generalized anxiety disorder, depressive symptoms and sleep quality during COVID-19 outbreak in China: a web-based cross-sectional survey', *Psychiatry Research*, 288, pp. 1–6.

Jiang, D. *et al.* (2021) 'Patterns of mental health problems before and after easing COVID-19 restrictions: Evidence from a survey in the general population in China', *PLoS ONE*, 16(8), pp. 1–12.

King, A., Goldfarb, B. and Simcoe, T. (2021) 'Learning from Testimony on Quantitative Research in Management', *Academy of Management Review*, 46(3), pp. 465–488.

Kniffin, K. M. *et al.* (2021) 'COVID-19 and the Workplace: Implications, Issues, and Insights for Future Research and Action', *American psychologist*, 1 January, pp. 63–77.

Koh, D. and Goh, H. P. (2020) 'Occupational health responses to COVID-19: What lessons can we learn from SARS?', *Journal of occupational health*, 62(1).

Kumar, B. and Lata, S. (2021) 'Promoting Mental Health during COVID-19 Pandemic', *Indian Journal of Positive Psychology*, 12(3), pp. 242–244.

Likert, R. (1932). A technique for the measurement of attitudes. *Archives of Psychology*, 22(140), pp. 1–55.

MacAllister, L. (2021) 'Resetting for post-pandemic office space', *Health facilities management*, 34(5), p. 6.

Martins, L. L., Gilson, L. L., & Maynard, M. T. (2004) 'Virtual teams: What do we know and where do we go from here?', *Journal of Management*, 30, pp. 805–835.

Mitchell, A. (2021) 'The Best of Both Worlds: 5 Steps for Hybrid Work Success', *Workforce Solutions Review*, 12(3), pp. 14–17.

Naor, M. *et al.* (2022) 'The impact of COVID-19 on office space utilization and real-estate: a case study about teleworking in Israel as new normal', *Journal of Facilities Management*, 20(1), pp. 32–58.

Nell, P. C., Foss, N. J., Klein, P. G., & Schmitt, J. (2020). Avoiding digitalization traps: Tools for top managers. *Business Horizons*. Advance online publication.

Nielsen, M.B. and Knardahl, S.N. (2020) 'The impact of office design on medically certified sickness absence', *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health*, 46(3), pp. 330-334.

Ozcelik, H. and Barsade, S. G. (2018) 'No Employee an Island: Workplace Loneliness and Job Performance', *Academy of Management Journal*, 61(6), pp. 2343–2366.

Parker, L. D. (2020) 'The COVID-19 office in transition: cost, efficiency and the social responsibility business case', *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, 33(8), pp. 1943–1967.

Patterson, O. (2014) 'Making sense of culture', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 40, 1–30.

Pfefferbaum B, North CS (2020) 'Mental health and the Covid-19 pandemic', *N Engl J Med*, 383(6), pp. 510–512.

PWC (2021) 'PwC's US Remote Work Survey'
<https://www.pwc.com/us/en/library/covid-19/us-remote-work-survey.html>

Ramarajan, L., & Reid, E. (2013) 'Shattering the myth of separate worlds: Negotiating nonwork identities at work', *Academy of Management Review*, 38, pp. 621–644.

Rashid, M., Wineman, J., & Zimring, C. (2009) 'Space, behavior, and environmental perception in open-plan offices: A prospective study', *Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design*, 36(3), pp. 432-449.

Rodríguez-Rey R., Garrido-Hernansaiz H., and Collado S. (2020) 'Psychological Impact and Associated Factors During the Initial Stage of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic Among the General Population in Spain', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11.

Samani, S. A. and Alavi, S. M. S. Z. (2020a) 'Are Open-Plan Office Designs Still Popular After Coronavirus Pandemic?', *Performance Improvement*, 59(8), pp. 24–32.

Samani, S.A., & Alavi, S.M.S.Z. (2020b) 'Does the design of the workplace affect individual creativity?', *Performance Improvement*, 59(5), pp. 6-16.

Singson, J. (2021) 'Resilient Design is Good Design: Adaptable Strategies throughout the Workplace', *Facility Management Journal / FMJ*, 31(3), pp. 118–122.

Subedi, B.P. (2016) 'Using Likert Type Data in Social Science Research: Confusion, Issues and Challenges', *International Journal of Contemporary Applied Sciences*, 3(2), pp. 36–49.

Theresa Obuobisa-Darko (2022) 'Managing employees' health, safety and anxiety in a pandemic', *International Journal of Workplace Health Management*, 15(2), pp. 113–130.

Torales, J., O'Higgins, M., Castaldelli-Maia, J. M., & Ventriglio, A. (2020) 'The outbreak of COVID-19 coronavirus and its impact on global mental health', *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, 36.

Tušl, M., Brauchli, R., Kerksieck, P. *et al.* (2021) 'Impact of the COVID-19 crisis on work and private life, mental well-being and self-rated health in German and Swiss employees: a cross-sectional online survey', *BMC Public Health*, 21, 741.

Vilnai-Yavetz, I., Rafaeli, A. and Yaacov, C. S. (2005) 'Instrumentality, Aesthetics, and Symbolism of Office Design', *Environment and Behavior*, 1 January, pp. 533–551.

Vogt, W. P. (1999) *Dictionary of Statistics and Methodology: A Non-Technical Guide for the Social Sciences* (2nd ed.). London: Sage Publications.

Weng, L. & Cheng, C. P. (2000) 'Effects of response order on Likert-type scales', *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 60, pp. 908 -924.

World Health Organization (2018) 'Mental health: Strengthening our response'
<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response>

World Health Organization (2019) Burn-out an "occupational phenomenon": International Classification of Diseases
<https://www.who.int/news/item/28-05-2019-burn-out-an-occupational-phenomenon-international-classification-of-diseases>

World Health Organization (2020) World Health Organization Director-General's statement on IHR Emergency Committee on Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV)
[https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-statement-on-ih-er-emergency-committee-on-novel-coronavirus-\(2019-ncov\)](https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-statement-on-ih-er-emergency-committee-on-novel-coronavirus-(2019-ncov))

Zoltan, E. S. (2014) 'Office spaces for more innovation and space efficiency', *Pollack Periodica: An International Journal for Engineering and Information Sciences*, 9(2), p. 67.

Babapour Chafi, M. 1983, Hultberg, A. and Yams, N. B. (2022) 'Post-pandemic office work: Perceived challenges and opportunities for a sustainable work environment', *Sustainability*, 14(1).