Digital transformation, creativity & innovation during the Covid-19: An employee perspective

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Abstract
   In the last few months Covid-19 has risen many issues regarding the policies applied in managing, motivating employees in order to be creative and nurture innovative ideas. Leaders and managers came across a great challenge and should find ways to promote the new reality to their employees to keep them interested in the activities they had to accomplish in the most successful way possible. Covid-19 forced everyone to go through a great transformation, adopt new habits, be engaged in the digital world in order to meet the needs of the new normal. In this research we will examine whether the practices used by managers to maintain creativity and innovation met their goal, while anxiety and insecurity overwhelmed all the parts involved. We will also try to explore the role technology played in promoting original ideas during that period as well as the barriers that had to be overcome and whether culture played any or no role at all in showing flexibility towards the new practices. In order to reach a conclusion, research will be conducted with the use of questionnaires and cross-examination of data collected by similar studies. This research will contain analysis of the data collected and a conclusion drawn defining and clarifying the questions set, examined from the employees' perspective.

1. Introduction
Theoretical Background

   In the last few months, a worldwide disease has been spread, known as Covid-19 and led our lives to transform in many ways. Along with the transformation of our lives as individuals, companies also needed to transform in multiple ways in order to be able to survive during that crisis. The majority of companies were in a way forced to change their traditional way of operating and needed to adopt a more digital way and follow the digital trend that was spreading all over the world. Being able to transform, automatically means that you need to become more creative and innovative and adopt technologies and ways that best suit the company's philosophy. Every company, no matter what changes in the way of operating, needs to adjust those changes to the basic characteristics and philosophy, since those are the things that actually retain them in the market. Covid-19 could be considered an accelerator for creativity and innovation which led to digital transformation for many companies and was a one-way street in order to actually survive.

   Due to Covid-19 many companies needed to readjust their whole operation system, in order to be able to face the crisis of the last year and confront the challenges that the lockdown brought across them. The pandemic and the different approaches taken by national governments to enact a lockdown has accelerated the volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA) across the social, economic, political, and technological environment (Saleh & Watson,2017). Compassion must be had for business leaders, as no amount of forecasting or horizon scanning would have predicted such a catastrophic impact that has been witnessed in the past few months nor not what the future might unfold. However, many aspects of business decision-making have worryingly shifted (but these are exceptional times) during this period to becoming more short-term and purely operational (Cole, 2020). Some organizations examined their previously carefully constructed business continuity plans and immediately recognized the paucity of their efforts in the face of a genuine and significant global crisis (Wallace, 2020).

   Along with the companies themselves, individuals as employees had to readjust to the new methods that needed to be followed in order to be able to maintain their position in the company they worked and find out ways to balance the new demands with their everyday life. Within days, in some cases, the place

they were living and was the place that they turned to for relaxation and spending time with their families, became their workplace and needed to find ways in order to be able to split their time within the same space between work and every other activity they used to do up to that time. Companies should find ways to support their employees and make them feel safe and supported, in order for them to be as efficient as they were within the facilities of the company. Through this research we will try to find out whether they were successful on their purpose and manage to maintain their productivity at the same levels and also try to figure out if employees agreed with the results of the same actions.

1.2. Research Question

How efficient were companies in adjusting to the needs the pandemic has risen and whether employees share the same view?

1.3 Aims and Objectives

Through this research we will examine whether the practices used by managers to overcome the difficulties and obstacles due to the pandemic met their goal, while anxiety and insecurity overwhelmed all the parts involved. We will also try to understand the role technology played and in what level in adjusting to the new challenges especially form the part of the employees during that period as well as the barriers that had to be overcome and whether culture and attitude played any or no role at all in showing flexibility towards the new practices.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Creativity and Innovation

It is often said that during a crisis opportunities arise as long as anyone would be adaptive, flexible, and insightful. Those qualities along with creativity and innovation are considered skills that would help see or even create opportunities at any time and mostly during a crisis if someone would have the courage to try their ideas. The particular universal crisis made current more than any other time the terms of VUCA. VUCA is an acronym – first used in 1987, drawing on the leadership theories of Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus – to describe or to reflect on the volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity of general conditions and situations. VUCA world shows the unpredictable nature of the world at stake like the situation of Covid-19 we are in right now. The deeper meaning of each element of VUCA serves to enhance the strategic significance of VUCA foresight and insight as well as the behavior of groups and individuals in organizations. It discusses systemic failures and behavioral failures, which are characteristic of organizational failure.

As Walton has written Design Thinking is a new approach to create breakthrough innovation and promote high-performance collaboration. It is quite different from analytical thinking and is a process for action. It is a method for discovering new opportunities and solving problems. It is generally understood that there are five key elements in design thinking: (1) defining the problem, (2) developing the options, (3) determining the direction, (4) selecting the best solution and (5) executing. While there are a variety of techniques and tools that can be used, the core process is somewhat universal. The majority of companies had to follow that procedure in order to be able to survive through the last year and deal with the difficulties that the pandemic brought in their way. In a very limited time, they had to define all the problems the pandemic rose regarding their functionality, start developing alternatives to proceed with, design a path that would be followed in order to meet their goals, selecting the best way to succeed and turn that plan into their everyday reality. Although digital transformation has become a goal to achieve for most companies in the last few years, most of them had to expedite most of the plans they had in progress and even change their strategy to be able to meet the new demands that rose up because of the pandemic. (2017)

The terms creativity and innovation are often used interchangeably (Man, 2001); however, there is a clear distinction between creativity and innovation, the former being the generation of ideas and the latter its implementation. In the era of globalization, digitalization and competition, creativity and innovation are considered to be key factors for survival, success, and excellence of organizations (Peter Cook, 1998). Creativity has always been considered to be the force that makes the world go round. People need to be creative in order to overcome difficulties and inconveniences to make everyday activities simpler and

easier and most of all gain time. Companies and organizations need to be and remain creative in order to survive throughout the changes that take place every day in the business world.

Creativity is a critical skill for recognizing or creating opportunity in a dynamic environment. Creativity resulting in products, services, and processes is now more important than ever due to globalization and hyper competition (Hisrich, Ramadani 2017). There is no one idea of creativity that is appropriate for all activities. Creativity requires both cognitive and no cognitive skills, inquisitiveness, intuition, and determination. Creative solutions can be created or discovered immediately or over long periods of time. Creativity is not just a revolutionary changing product that comes from world-renowned innovators like Alexander Graham Bell, Thomas Edison, Albert Einstein, Sigmund Freud, or more recently James Dyson, Steve Jobs, or Mark Zuckerberg. Instead, it is the ability to consistently produce different, new valuable results (Trifan, Guica, Micu 2012).

Capturing an idea and put it in motion are the two things needed in order to support the concept creativity. Innovation is the production or implementation of an idea. According to psychologist Seema Hingorany having ideas but not acting on them might be imaginative but not creative. Generative research shows that everyone is able of being creative. The more diverse the training a person receives, the greater the potential for creative output is. The average adult among three to six alternatives for any given situation, while the average child reaches up to sixty ones. There are several ways for a company to trace any creative elements in each one of their employees and capitalize on it for the development of the company itself.

According to what Walton has written innovation occurs through cycles of divergent creative thinking, which brings about many potential alternatives followed by convergence to a selected solution. Divergence is breaking from the normal and familiar ways of doing things. It is focused on coming up with new ideas and solutions. It expands the number of potential solutions through the process of creativity. It is the most dynamic and social phase and underpins the creative process. Convergence is the achievement of some agreement regarding the benefits of a given idea and the value in pursuing that idea. It removes any nonviable options. It is an assessment in terms of the implementation issues. Unless the convergence stage is well managed, the most viable and innovative ideas may be lost. Creativity depends on a repeated cycle of divergence and convergence to first create a diversity of options and then determine the best ideas to implement. This process takes time and depends on the question or problem facing the organization. The creative process involves both logical and analytical thinking in the preparation, validation, and implementation stages. It calls for imagining, using intuition, conceptualizing, and synthesizing in the incubation and illumination stages. (R.D. Hisrich, V. Ramadani, Effective Entrepreneurial Management, Springer Texts in Business and Economics, Chapter3, p38,2017)

As Hisrich and Ramadani have written 'Creativity is a process that can lead to incremental improvements or breakthrough innovations. While breakthrough innovations such as penicillin, the computer, and the automobile are wonderful, most innovations make incremental improvements to existing product lines rather than bringing something radically new to market. Technological innovations such as voice and text messaging and the jet airplane occur more frequently than breakthrough innovations. Incremental innovation is the form of innovation that occurs most frequently and makes minor changes in the product or service' (2017). According to them creativity can range from low levels to relatively high levels. Lower-level creativity involves incremental modifications and adjustments of an existing idea or a combination of two or more previously unrelated ideas in a novel and useful way. Higher level creativity involves more breakthrough contributions. During the last year although there were breakthrough ideas that took place in many sectors, most companies were forced to lower levels of creativity in order to be able to handle the universal crisis of Covid-19. As Sam Walton has claimed creativity can range from low levels to relatively high levels. Lower-level creativity frequently involves incremental modifications and adjustments of an existing idea or a combination of two or more previously unrelated ideas in a novel and useful way. During the last year most, companies would say that have been moving in lower levels of creativity, since they needed to spend most of their energy in adjusting to the new reality that Covid-19 enforced to the whole world. (R.D. Hisrich, V. Ramadani, Effective Entrepreneurial Management, Springer Texts in Business and Economics, Chapter3, p38,2017)

2.2 Digital Transformation

Digital transformation can be defined as: "a process that aims to improve an entity by triggering significant changes to its properties through combinations of information, computing, communication, and connectivity technologies" (Vial, 2019). Digital Transformation is not a new concept, but it became more crucial than ever during the past year because of the pandemic Covid-19 which enforced everyone to find ways to avoid personal contact and get things done by keeping their distance to prevent the spreading of the virus. Apart from using the digital technology, for something to be considered digital transformation in a business, needs to make noteworthy change in its model with the use of that technology (Fitzgerald et al, 2014). According to G. Fletcher and M. Griffit in terms of digital transformation there are three key lessons that can so far be detected in the pandemic period. There are many more things to learn regarding how data, information and technology were treated and arranged during the pandemic, along with many workforces' behavior and wellbeing related issues; organizations must improve their digital maturity; less digitally mature organizations are more fragile; and organizations with higher levels of digital maturity are generally more flexible. In their article 'Digital transformation during a lockdown' G. Fletcher and M. Griffit there is increasing evidence of how elastic and fluid business models are allowing businesses to continue (2020).

Covid-19 was the reason that many aspects of everyday life changed completely from the traditional way they occurred up to that point. A great example was that of distance education. Before the pandemic most countries were using only the traditional way to have lessons in the classroom where the tutor and students were interacting. When they were forced to have lessons in distance online learning became popular where the tutor and students needed to connect to a specific platform and work through their lesson digitally and remotely (Stauffer, 2020). According to UNESCO by March of 2020 1,38 billion students around the globe and of different levels of education were forced to remain in their houses because of the lockdown and were introduced to distant education (Li & Lalani, 2020). Children and parents needed to learn and adjust to a new way of learning since that was the only option they had until the pandemic was over and they would be able to have personal interaction again.

Another transformation that occurred during the pandemic was that of telecommuting and videoconferencing. According to data collected from the European Union (Eurostat, 2020) entering March 2020, 110 million people in the European Union were working from home, while in the United States the number was up to 54 million of telecommuters (Desilver, 2019). With telecommuting growing rapidly videoconferencing applications such as Apple's FaceTime, Cisco's Webex, Microsoft's Skype or Zoom, although being available for a long time (Zec and Matthes, 2018) met a sharp growth during the last year (Lev-Ram, 2020). According to a study that took place in 2017 by Gallup the percentage of American employees that were partially working from home was 43%, while during the pandemic that amount increased up to 90% (Bick et al, 2020). All that change made imperative the use of those application so that everyone could be informed on the spot about critical information regarding their work and be able to go through with everything. Along with the growing demanding of the internet use for work or education from home internet streaming has drastically risen, since people were forced to stay indoors during the lockdown and used the internet to gather information or for entertainment reasons (Bhargava et al., 2020).

Another breakthrough was the augmentation of e-payment and transactions. During the coronavirus and in making a great effort to reduce the spread of the virus many people of different ages and educational background started using the already available applications to make their transaction instead of paying in cash as they were used to until that point (Liébana-Cabanillas et al., 2018). According to Jones & Nikolaeva credit card payments replaced the traditional way of payment in Europe, mostly because banks decided to lower the ceiling of e-payments through credit card in smaller businesses and stores (2020). In other countries such as Chine of India there was an increase in payments by using applications supported for smartphones (Rooney, 2020), while more than 600 million of European and American citizens have been already using mobile payments (Fortune, 2019).

2.3 Companies' perspective

Most companies needed to adjust the way of operating and find new ways or expanding the existing ways in order to keep their operation moving, while employees needed to create new ways to be able to keep up with the changes that were taking place in the blink of an eye. A lot of people had a hard time

since they were facing many new things that needed a lot of their effort to be handled. Many employees that were also parents needed to find ways to balance and combine the time they had to work from home while their children had to take their classes electronically. Apart from the practical things that needed to be taken care of, there were also other things that everyone had to handle. The anxiety that everyone felt about keeping their job, being able to work or study from home while not having an option to escape at any time because of the lockdown. Companies needed to find ways to support their employees not only towards the practical needs in order to be able to keep up with the work that needed to be done, but also psychologically since that was a new reality for both parts and in order to be able to keep up with one part, the other one needed to be taken care of too.

Along with creativity comes innovation. According to Baregheh et al attempting in 2009 to give a more accurate definition in innovation, offered the following one: "Innovation is the multi-stage process whereby organizations transform ideas into new/improved products, service or processes, in order to advance, compete and differentiate themselves successfully in their marketplace". In the last decade or more every organization tends to become more digital by finding new practices in order to digitalize their operations and procedures and meet the competition. In order to be able to meet that target they need to marry creativity with innovation and adjust their existing means to new procedures. The most important target of innovation is searching for effective approaches to improve the value chain for the organization and its stakeholders (Freeman, 2004; Harrison & Freeman, 2017). Innovation has become compulsory for organizational sustainability and has demonstrated its importance during the pandemic crisis of Covid-19 (Stoll, 2020).

All organizations and companies from the first day of the pandemic worked very hard in order to be able to find ways of keeping their work done, having in mind all the drastic measures governments all around the world had to enforce. They adjusted very quickly (in most cases) technologies that up to that point were used in a very limited way and expand them in order to be able to involve every employee to those practices in order to keep up with their work. An example that stands out in the telecommunication sector in Greece, is that of OTE Group of Companies , which was able to achieve within three days, almost 80% of their employees to work remotely in order to stay safe and protect themselves and their beloved ones, as the CEO of the company Mr Tsamaz has announced in his interview in "Kathimerini" on the 13th of March 2020 (online article Kathimerini, entered 22/6/2021 13:46). Out of the 16.000 employees 13.000 were able to work remotely within three days after the announcement of the first lockdown took place in Greece. OTE Group of Companies was able to expand practices that were used in a restricted way and among few employees up to then, so that a major part of the company would stay safe by working remotely and protect themselves while maintaining their job. By March 25th, approximately 2.3 billion people were forced to stay to their homes due to the lockdown. India accounted for 1.3 billion (Suri et al., 2020) leaving the rest 900 million in 35 other countries around the globe (Agence France-Press, 2020).

Digital Transformation does not only have to do with the improvement of the means already used by applying new and more advanced technologies which is generally known as digitalization. Digital Transformation reveals a fundamental reinvention of the way individuals, organizations, governments, and society are dealing with certain procedures (O'Halloran & Griffin, 2019). Digital Transformation is applied not only by advanced technologies, but also by mutual creation of shared goals (Porter & Kramer, 2011; Von Briel, Schneider, & Lowry, 2019) by converging strategies and creative ideas. Digital Transformation was the mean used in order to develop autonomous systems, social networks (Li & Bernoff, 2008), and AI-powered smart systems (e.g., smart homes, infrastructure, cities, and countries) (Rogers, 2016). These developments have enabled the creation of ambient intelligence and the paradigm of "smart everything" (Streitz, Charitos, Kaptein, & Bohlen, 2019). Digital Transformation was the reason that organizations were able to expand globally and create value chains with connectivity, agility, flexibility, and dynamic capabilities, all imperatives for sustainability of business enterprises in the age of urgency (De Smet & Gagnon, 2018). Digital Transformation has also enabled governments and nonprofit institutions to become smart digital entities with human and social e-services, citizen participation systems, 24/7 policing (Lee & Trimi, 2018). Digital Transformation has provided an impetus to the development of Convergence innovation.

Throughout the human evolution innovation can be found in every aspect of human life. Humans have always struggled to find new ways to improve the quality of life, from the hunting-gathering age to agrarian economy, industrial age, information age, and now knowledge economy (Lee, 2018). Every innovation initially brings a major shakeout as happened in automobiles, PC manufacturing, smartphones etc. The number of producers would first increase steadily, and then, as the value pool consolidates, it will drop rapidly (Bughin, Catlin, Hirt, & Willmort, 2018). According to Siebel, when the new change is being operationalized, a period of a more tranquil equilibrium would prevail only to be punctuated by new innovations that would be superior to previous ones used (2019). Every organization, no matter its size and purpose, has a chain of activities to create value added. The most important purpose of innovation is searching for effective approaches to improve the value chain for the organization and its stakeholders (Freeman, 2004; Harrison & Freeman, 2017).

All of the analysis done for the concept of creativity and innovation comes to meet the crisis the pandemic brought since March of 2020 and enforced organizations and companies to follow that path in order to be able to survive. The fact that people were scared and were in a way forbidden to go out in order to buy the things they needed for their everyday life, many supermarket and groceries chains were forced to work more intensively to create or improve their apps or e-shops, so that everyone could be able to make their orders from the safety of their home. Online stores work hard in order to improve the procedure the visitors had to follow in order to submit their orders and found new ways to make easier the communication among their departments and the costumers themselves. Although during the previous years there was a variety of electronic applications that could help to the communication between parts, people preferred the meetings in person or through the telephone, while the use of application such as skype, viber, messenger, zoom etc were not so popular. During the past year many companies started using additional means to improve or even maintain the contact with their customers in the desirable level, while were enforced to use them for their internal communication because of the lockdown.

As mentioned before apart from working remotely, in order for every part of a company or organization to keep up with every new announcement, change or direction they had to be in continuous contact with each other to be informed. While in previous times an announcement could be done in person as everyone were available to the workplace, now that was a bit difficult. Having that concept in mind everyone started to share information more through e-mails, messages through various applications and of course teleconferencing so that they could stay in touch and have at some level the same feeling of being near their co-workers. This kind of contact arose new difficulties and questions among the parts using the new means considering the level of safety of that transmitting information through the use of those applications and of course that led to a new need for all companies and organizations; the need to improve their systems regarding the transmission of critical information and the measures they had to take in order to be able to keep their data safe. They needed to expand or even find new applications in order to protect themselves, their customers', and employees' data from exposure.

2.4 Employees' perspective

Apart from companies and organizations employees as individuals came across the same path dealing the pandemic crisis. Many decisions needed to be made on everyday things that never before seemed to be of such importance and difficulty as now, since nothing likewise had ever appeared before in our lives. Having to live your everyday life the way you used to, but at the same time needing to change many aspects of it was a very challenging thing for everyone. People needed to take care of their selves, their families at the same way they used to but adopt new approaches for the same activities they did up to that point and make sure it would have the same result on them because otherwise they might collapse. People needed to keep 'going' to work every day as they used to, but now their workplace would be their own home. They had to interact with the people they used to but only from distance and by using electronic means. They needed to take care their home in a more careful way than before, because now that was their home, their workplace, the place they could exercise and spent their whole day. In order to achieve that and make sure that it would not affect their mental status they should find ways to make that happen and experiment with many alternatives to find the one way that fitted most their ways and needs.

As far as everyday life is concerned people adopted new habits in order to make their daily routines easier. According to Brem et al six technologies grew through the pandemic and were widely used by a big part of people who needed to stay at home: distance education, e-gaming, videoconferencing, internet streaming, cashless payments, and e-commerce & home delivery (Technological Forecasting and Social Changes, p163,2021). People had to find ways to cope with the difficulties that arose with the coming of the lockdown due to the pandemic and since organizations and companies focused on developing those parameters on the way they operated, people became more familiar with each concept and started using them without hesitating or skepticism anymore. During a crisis, such as the pandemic of COVID-19, people come in a place and they are willing to deliberate over new practices, that would seem unacceptable if the case was not the one, they were going through. According to Brem et al "The control of individual movement and the replacement of humans by artificial intelligence and robots, which were hugely unpopular a few months ago are now increasingly considered attractive solutions".

Everyone in a blink of an eye had to adjust every aspect of their lives in their homes. As Boas Shamir and Ilan Salomon have written in their article "Work-at-Home and the Quality of Working Life" the domestic model of work is not something new and has not appeared in nowadays because of the pandemic. It was widely known and supported in preindustrial societies and coexisted with the factory system in nineteenth century Europe and the United States, while it is still very common in some Asian countries. Quoting Bythell's words at the end of his book "Outwork is rightly relegated to one of the darkest chapters of economic history, and now that it is virtually dead none should regret its passing" (1956, p. 254). Nevertheless, there are many different aspects among the variety of domestic work systems that are used now and telecommuting, which need further advisement before they are adopted and any permanent arrangements could be reached (Academy of Management Review, 1985, Vol. 10, No.3, 455).

According to one widely accepted formulation (Hackman & Oldham, 1976), employees' productivity along with their satisfaction and attitudes, are strongly linked to certain psychological conditions: experienced meaningfulness of the work, experienced responsibility for outcomes of the work and knowledge of the actual results of the work activities, which in turn, are connected to certain core dimensions of the job: autonomy, feedback, task significance, skill variety, and task meaningfulness. The literature on work-at-home has created a sense that the autonomy of the worker is likely to be increased by switching from the regular place of work to working at home. Due to first thought and impressions the employees working from home are not so easy to be supervised and that could lead to more flexibility in the choice of working hours and work patterns. However, the actual repercussions of that switch on the level of employees' autonomy have shown that it may not change; it may even decrease, depending on several factors. For certain professional employees, including information technicians, who already enjoy a high degree of autonomy with respect to the choice of working hours and work patterns are not likely to be significantly affected by a transfer to the home. For others, who might be persons with childcare responsibilities, working from home might have more responsibilities and be more demanding, so it could offer less opportunities of autonomy than the workplace (Boas, Ilan, Academy of Management Review, 1985, Vol. 10, No.3, 456-457).

Following the new reality everyone should find ways to adjust the new demands to their own routine. People working from home had its benefits and disadvantages which affect different people in different ways. As described above everyone started working in a more autonomous way. Up to that point employees were used to work nearby their coworkers and supervisors and knew that if there was anything that they would need help with, there would always be someone available to ask for help, advice, or suggestions on how to deal with that particular matter. All of the sudden what was taken for granted changed and although through electronic means, help would seem to remain at the same levels, that was not the case at all situations. Because of the lack of physical presence noone could know what the other person was doing or whether they were available to help them, since they could not see them. In that way even if the employee needed any kind of help and tried calling his/her supervisor or coworker, sending a message through any kind of application, they could not be sure that the response would be an immediate one. Most of the times and because of the reason described before a lot of tasks were delayed and the employee him/herself had to keep a lot of tasks in abeyance and in that way spend more time afterwards to complete a lot of tasks at the same time in order to keep up with any deadlines that had

been set. Accordingly, the feedback that needed to be given through the new means was something that everyone had to think twice since when communicating from a distance, the message that you want to send would be send, but all the other aspects of the social contact couldn't be transferred (such as tone of voice, any physical explanatory gestures etc). As Boas and Ilan have mentioned in their article Work-at-Home and the Quality of Working Life, the nonverbal communication signals are in some cases very important for the transformation of the information needed to be said and telecommunication means lack of that kind of quality. They are considered such an important part of the feedback procedure, that the absence of them could be considered to lead to poorer feedback and of less quality that it would make a huge negative impact in their work (p.458). A lot of employees might have felt that way since it has been proven that in everyday communication and social contact many messages are interpreted through nonverbal language among the speakers and the lack of it can many times drive someone to the wrong conclusion.

Furthermore, following the results of the lockdown employees came across another problem they had to overcome, the social relation. While growing up the social groups created in anyone's life are closely bonded to the different aspects of our live. For example, when being at school your schoolmates are the ones that you would be socialized more because you share the same interests and fears and spent a great amount of time together. The same thing happens in the work environment and the place of your schoolmates is being taken by your colleagues. Apart from helping you on the actual job you have to do, they become your social group because they are the ones that share the same problems with you and can understand any difficulties you might come across since they are in the same boat as you. Working from home arose a big obstacle on that matter, since suddenly people were not able to able to have the support, they might need from the group of people they knew would understand them the most. None could argue that your family and beloved ones would make anything to help you that there are aspects that only someone having the same experiences could fully understand and would be able to help you in a suitable way. Social relations created at the workplace are also considered to be one the most important parameters of job satisfaction (Albertson, 1978; Jahoda, 1979; Locke, 1976). As two experiments done by Olson (1981) have shown, telecommuting causes work socializing decrease, which could easily lead to job quality reduction.

Following that assumption anyone could reach the conclusion that if employees working from home won't find another way to interact and start socializing, that need would remain unfulfilled which could by its turn lead to less satisfied and motivated employees, who would not care for job matters as much as the ones that would work from the original workplace (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Additionally, the socialization in considered to be very important in order to transfer the organizational culture among the participants in a more unofficial way. The lack of that could create an environment that not all employees interpret the culture of the company they work, the goals and vision it has and eventually been unable to transfer that same message to the target group of clients (Hackman, 1976). In that way coworkers will not be able to bond with each other and in many cases will not find the support needed in order to be in a position of surviving within the company and have that feeling of loneliness and cut out of the rest of their work group.

Due to the reasons described above individuals needed to find ways to keep in touch with their co-workers in order to balance their work hours, their work relationships, and personal relationships within the new reality. As companies did, individuals started to contact with each other using a variety of electronic means and applications that gave them the chance to communicate with each other as they kept being nearby. More video calls were conducted, apart from the exchange of written messages and even group meetings through digital platform in order to catch up with their news personal of professional. For many people, that going to work was a way of escaping from the problems or pressure of their homes, that was their new way of escaping and socializing with everyone and offered them a kind of relief, knowing that there were others who shared the same thoughts, difficulties, and worries. Especially for people who had to take care others within their home, such as children or elderly parents, and was more difficult to find some time for themselves, that way was an escape of that routine and offered them relaxation and some moments of discussing with another individual different aspects of everyday life.

Apart from those aspects, telecommuting arose many obstacles to employees that were not familiar with this way of working and hence they came across many different and, in some cases, difficult choices in order to be able to meet the demands of their job and their personal lives. According to general opinion telecommuting can benefit both companies and employees since it is strongly connected to the amount of autonomy (Dambrin 2004; Wilson and Greenhill 2004), balancing work-life with personal life (Azarbouyeh and Naini 2014; Felstead et al. 2002; Raghuram and Wiesenfeld 2004; Sullivan and Lewis 2006) and an increasing in work performance (Fonner and Roloff, 2010). It is also thought to affect in a higher degree and have a more positive impact to the balance between personal and work life of people that have in higher extend family obligations (Golden 2006; Shockley and Allen 2007). Employees who have for example children at a young age, would seem to prefer working from home because it gave them the chance to be able to help their children if something needed or be able to pick up them from school during their brake, without having to interrupt their actual work. They would be able to better manage with the work needed to be done at home (such as cleaning, cooking etc) since they would not have to lose any time with public transportation that might not be on time or worry if they would be on time to go or pick up their children from an after-school activity. In that way they were able to gain time and spend it more "productively" in organizing their time towards their job and their family which would offer them more opportunities to be less anxious and perform in a better way to their job and meet their responsibilities in more creative and effective ways.

In contrast to the positive affect digital transformation, which brought telecommuting in our lives, has on employees, there are evidence to support the opposite and show that the results are no so encouraging regarding the lives of employees. A major concern has been risen towards the fact that working from home could increase stress among employees because strict margins can be put between home and workplace and that by itself could escalate disputes between work and family issues (Hardill and Green 2003; Mann and Holdsworth 2003; Russell et al. 2009; Standen et al. 1999; Sullivan 2012; Wheatley et al. 2008). As Mirchandani supports telecommuting can increase the levels of stress and anxiety on employees, since they need to find ways to combine and harmonize home and work activities (2000, p.159–182). Furthermore, people working from home would concern whether they would be noticed and appreciated for their work. Meeting in person on a regular basis with supervisors and managers could lead to poor evaluation and even put additional boundaries on purchasing a promotion within the organization or company they work (Weinert, C., Maier, C., & Laumer, S., 2015, pp. 1407–1421). In addition to that people working from home combined with flexible hours offered from the employees could lead to employees spending actual more than their regular schedule, on work activities due to lack of concentration, privacy or other distractions within their home, in order to be able to meet any deadlines or productivity goals leading to more family conflicts, an unhappy family environment and lower effectiveness on job matters (Song, 2009, p.578–588). Following all the difficulties described so far, individuals needed to find ways to be able to separate their work and home time in order to remain as productive as possible regarding their work and also be able to remain committed to their family obligations, without leaving the work stress integrate with the time they would have on the after-work schedule activities and interests. Many of them adjusted a room in their home that was formed as an office, so that they would be able to separate themselves from the rest of the family and remain concentrate during the work hours, making the other members of the family understand that even though they were at the same place they should being considered absent, just like if they were to their workplace. When possible, many employees chose to work the night shift, in order to be able to enjoy the rest of their day with their family and make sure that they would not be distracted during their work hours, since everyone else would be asleep. In some cases, and in order to also avoid isolation, some employees would meet each other during their shifts and have a separate place to work as if they would meet at their original workplace.

Along with the adjustment that individuals needed to do regarding their work, they needed to adjust themselves to new habits, following the changes that occurred because of the pandemic. Working from home and saving time from not commuting from their place to their workplace they started using other means to complete everyday activities. One that became very popular was the engagement to online grocery shopping instead of going to the actual store and purchase the things they needed for their home.

Due to fear of being affected from the coronavirus, of tiredness or even saving time a lot of people started using regularly the various applications available for online shopping giving them time to relax or spend time with other hobbies or activities. Many people that used to exercise on a regular basis and now they did not have the option due to the fact that gyms and sports centers were closed because of the lockdown, started using applications to keep up with their workout routines which was also the way for them to stress out and relax themselves and prevent exhaustion.

3. Methodology

In the proceeding section the methodology approach is described and also the procedures used for an explanatory analysis of the research. This research was an empirical one where a questionnaire was used which was composed of closed – ended type questions. After gathering the responses, a descriptive analysis took place. The creation of the questionnaire was based on the google application Google Forms. It was distributed with the use of electronic means such as social media (Facebook) and message exchange applications (Messenger, Viber).

First, a brief analysis of the sample is given, and an explanatory analysis of the data collected follows.

4.1 Population and Sample

The sample consisted of 100 respondents. Participants were employees of the Hellenic private sector, working in the telecommunication sector. The questionnaire was addressed to permanent and temporary employees as well as full and part-time employees. The sample was consisted of individuals of different work experience and education level and also of different positions of organizational hierarchy.

4.2 Analysis of Personal Data

The sample consisted of 35 male participants and 61 female participants and 4 described as other, which could be translated to 35%, 61% and 4% respectively. The education level of the correspondents was 16% of High School graduates, diploma or an equivalent, 32% Bachelor, 42% Master, 3% Doctorate and 7% other. 78% of the participants were employees, 8% held a managerial position, while 14% held another position and 86% held a full-time job while the rest 14% were working part-time. Company tenure, which described the time of years at the same company, ranged between 1 and 25 years.

4.3 Analysis and results

Organizational reactions and adjustments to stressful situations such as the covid crisis are not limited to just operational and technical changes but also include changes involving human cognition and emotions. The manner in which organizations react and change to adapt to such crises would depend largely on the people who run . Firms whose leaders encourage creativity and innovation are more likely to implement new technologies with success (Helfat and Martin 2015; Leonard-Barton and Deschamps 1988) cited in Bick et.al (2020).

Regarding the answers given through the questionnaire that was distributed, 89% of the participants answered that before the pandemic of Covid-19 was only working in the office, in contrast to 9% that had flexible working options and only 5% working from home. After the pandemic and at the question whether people would like to return to the office an amount of 36% answered that they wanted to go back, while the rest 64% would prefer working either from home or having a flexible option with 31% and 33% correspondingly. Accordingly, 41% of the participants admitted that they feel optimistic about working from home, 38% that it does not have any different impact on them, while 21% feels pessimistic about the concept. After the pandemic and as far as extra safety measures would be taken by the employers to ensure the health and safety of the employees, 39% supported that their employer would do so, 23% that they would do to some extent while the rest 38% supported that they would not really expect that to happen, to actually not at all (33% and 5% respectively).

Regarding productivity of the participants more than half, 56% respectively, have answered that they feel that they are equally productive at their tasks working either from home or in the office, while 27% fee that they are more productive when working in the office in contrast to 17% that feels that they are more productive when working from home. At the question how they would feel towards their employer, if they would ask them to return at the office full time 43% answered that it would not have any effect on them, 30% that it would affect their view slightly negative with a 2% saying that it would affect them very

negative, while the rest 25% answered that it would have a positive or mostly positive effect on their opinion, with 14% and 11% correspondingly.

Regarding their return to the office 49% of the participants that they most looking forward to seeing their colleagues again, 23% being at the workplace environment, 11% having time away from home, 9% contacting with the public, 5% having financial security and 3% using their skills. On the other hand, 22% of the corresponds were least looking forward to wearing mask on their return to the office, 16% travelling to work, 15% using public transformation, 12% returning to the workplace environment, 10% missing their family or pets, 8% having time away from home and another 8% having contact with the public, another 6% experiencing social distancing, 3% seeing their colleagues again and a final 2% using their skills.

On their returning to work or seeking another role the most important thing according to the answers provided is salary with 28% and second comes career progression with 26%. 17% answered that training and development will be most important for them while 11% would expect flexible work hours. 8% will expect to have a shorter working week and another 6% will pay more attention on the commuting time. Only 3% will consider important working from home, while 1% would expect to be working part-time.

As far as the two biggest challenges that the participants are currently facing while working from home is concerned, they would be childcare and too many distractions at home with 33% each. For 32% of them was the general anxiety about the impact of the Coronavirus in their life, 30% found harder to communicate with their co-workers while 18% missed their physical workplace. Another 17% did not have access to the tools needed in order to be able to do their job and another 16% faced problems with their internet speed.

Regarding cyber security while working from home 31% had a moderate amount of concern, 29% did not concern at all, while 28% was slightly concerned and 11% were very concern about it. Last but not least 48% of the participants found it neither easy nor difficult to communicate with team members while working from home, while 36% found it easy despite the distance. 8% had no difficulties and found it very easy, while another 8% found it difficult to contact their team members.

Also, employee engagement is critical in difficult times and only leadership can do wonders through employee engagement via an effective communication plan. Deal, Stawiski, and Gentry (2010) cited in Bick et.al (2020), revealed that during the tough time, additional benefit packages and fair and comparable pay structures should be given to their employees to keep them engaged and motivated. To keep engagement high among employees, managers should provide effective feedback and direction to their subordinates from time to time.

5. Conclusion
5.1 Discussion
The main purpose of this paper was to find out whether the employees felt satisfied with the measures employers took during the pandemic and the lockdown that followed, in order for them to be able to continue working with the least possible losses on every level.

If we examine the answers that were gathered by the questionnaire distributed despite the difficulties that the participants had during their working from home, a large amount of them, even if they had never worked from home before that period, feel optimistic about working from home and would even consider either doing their job from distance either on a permanent basis or having a flexible option. The measures that were taken by the employers would be considered successful, if we take into account the fact that most of the participants feel that their productivity remained the same when they had to work from home since they were able to get their job done even if they were not at their regular workplace but had the means and the support needed.

Despite the fact that the communication between colleagues was relatively easy and not too hard for most of the employees, personal contact is one of the most important things that would be considered by people and employers when people be asked to return at the office. Almost all of the participants are looking forward to meeting & working again in their workplace with their colleagues, showing that no matter how good and efficient communication can be through alternative means, the members of the team would always feel safer and closer to each other when they would be able to have personal contact and see each other on a regular basis.

Furthermore, and despite the fact that, that changes took place rapidly, unexpected and under very difficult circumstances considering the pandemic of Covid-19, a major amount of people felt relatively safe regarding cyber dangers while working from home with the equipment that was provided. This would be considered to be a great success for both parts since it shows that the employees were feeling safe and did not feel that their private life was in danger, while the employers offered the necessary means so that all the information and data needed to be processed was safe no matter where the person handling them was.

Moreover, while one of the great challenges people had to deal with was the impact the Coronavirus would have on their lives, a large amount of the participants believe that their employers would take extra safety measures in order to keep their employees safe and healthy, making returning to the office easier for those that are concerned regarding that matter. Despite the fact that a great amount of the answers we gathered reveals that wearing a mask during the work hours, is the thing that everyone is the least looking forward doing, most people are looking forward to return to their workplace and be reunited with their colleagues, while a noticeable amount is looking forward to having some time away from home and escape from that daily routine.

Another issue that would be worth mentioning is the fact that after the period of the lockdown and working from home, people returning to work or even seek for a new role or position, would chase to have a stable or even higher income and career progression, something that could be a result of the greater autonomy that came during working from home as mentioned and analyzed earlier in the paper. Many people are expecting and probably would find alternatives to be further trained and develop their skills in order to be able to have other opportunities within the same company or be able to find correspondence to other positions. This could be a new start for both parts in order to develop in different ways. Employees could create new opportunities on many levels for themselves, while companies could consider ways to benefit themselves through helping their employees develop themselves and earn more in many ways.

5.2 Limitations

One major limitation of the current study is the sample size. Because of the limited resources available, the sample size, could not be considered large or representative enough to generalize the findings. On the same basis, it seems that some characteristics appear in large proportion, like gender where 61% are women or 86% appear to be working full-time in contrast to 14% part-time, which could be a parameter that if given in other amount could affect our results in a very noticeable way. Accordingly, since the pandemic is not over yet, we could assume that it might be too soon to conduct any further research regarding the feeling people have towards their work since their answers might still been driven from the fear of the Coronavirus and impact it could have on their lives and the beloved ones.

Lastly, given the fact that research and answers provided relied on self-reports, the absence of inflation between relations cannot be guaranteed. In order to moderate such an effect two important things were applied; first, the respondents were guaranteed about the anonymity of their participation, and secondly, they were assured that there were no right or wrong answers, in order for them to answer as honestly as possible.

5.2 Recommendations

Such subject of research could be a great opportunity for further empirical research including a broader sample and examining additional parameters, in order to be able to have a better understanding of the changes that occurred during the pandemic and the impact those changes had on a personal level as well as a universal one, when seen from a greater distance and when more parameters would be established.

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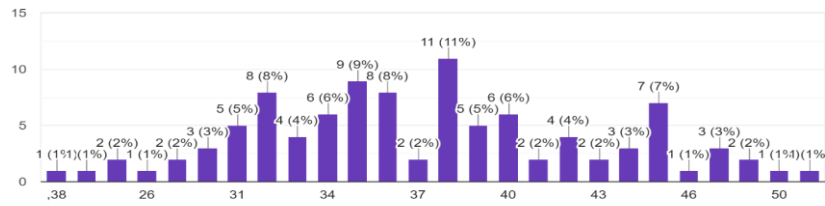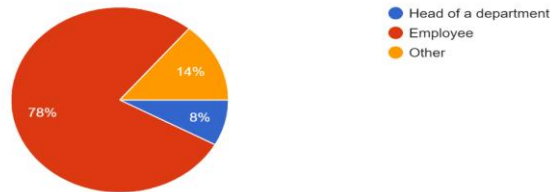
Appendix 1

Appendix 1Charts
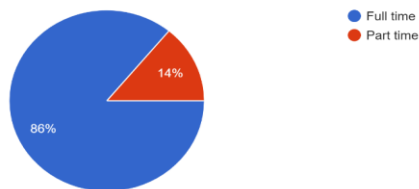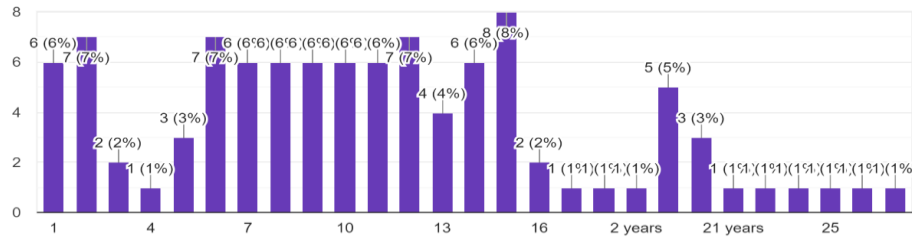
Gender
100 απαντήσεις
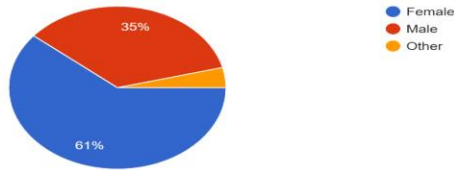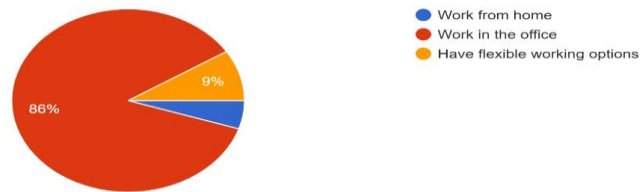

Age
100 απαντήσεις

Current job position
100 απαντήσεις

Type of employment
100 απαντήσεις

Years at the same job
100 απαντήσεις

Before the Covid-19 crisis did you
100 απαντήσεις

- Work from home
- Work in the office
- Have flexible working options

Do you want to return to working in an office?
100 απαντήσεις

- Yes
- No
- Only if flexible
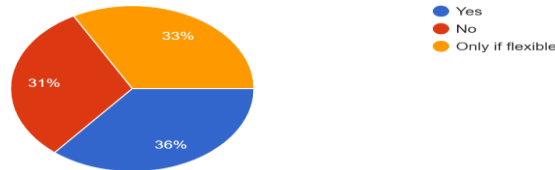
Are you feeling more optimistic or pessimistic about working from home?
100 απαντήσεις

- Optimistic
- Pessimistic
- About the same
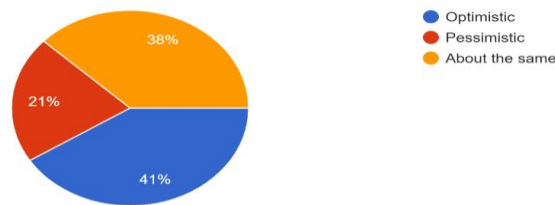
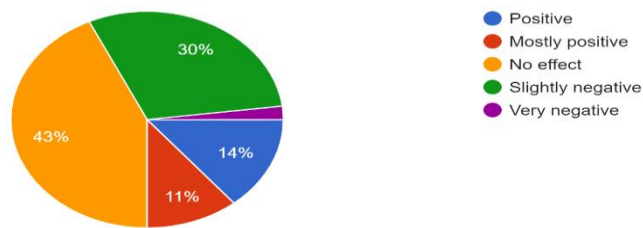**Will you expect your employer to take extra safety measures to ensure the health and safety of employees?**
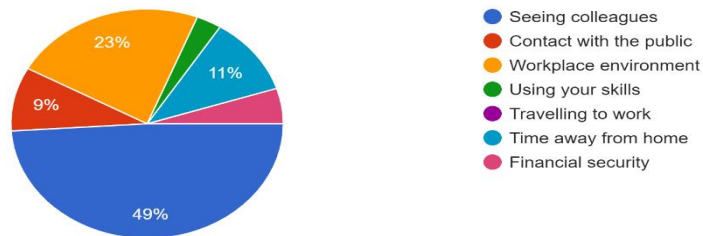100 απαντήσεις

- Yes
- To some extent
- Not really
- No

Where do you feel you are most productive?
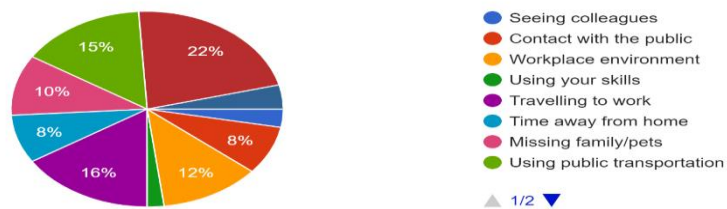100 απαντήσεις

- At home
- In the Office
- Equally productive at both

56%
27%
17%

If your employer asks you to return to the office full time, how will this affect your view of them?
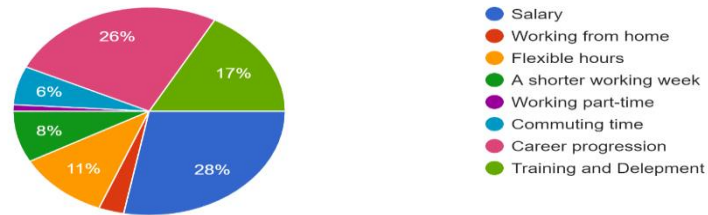100 απαντήσεις

- Positive
- Mostly positive
- No effect
- Slightly negative
- Very negative

30%
43%
14%
11%

What are you most looking forward to when you return to your workplace?
100 απαντήσεις

- Seeing colleagues
- Contact with the public
- Workplace environment
- Using your skills
- Travelling to work
- Time away from home
- Financial security

23%
9%
11%
49%

What are you least looking forward to when you return to your workplace?
100 απαντήσεις

- Seeing colleagues
- Contact with the public
- Workplace environment
- Using your skills
- Travelling to work
- Time away from home
- Missing family/pets
- Using public transportation

1/2 ▼

22%
15%
10%
8%
16%
12%
8%

Which of the following will be important to you when returning to work/seeking a new role?
100 απαντήσεις

- Salary
- Working from home
- Flexible hours
- A shorter working week
- Working part-time
- Commuting time
- Career progression
- Training and Delepment

What are the TWO biggest challenges you are currently facing whilst working from home?
100 απαντήσεις
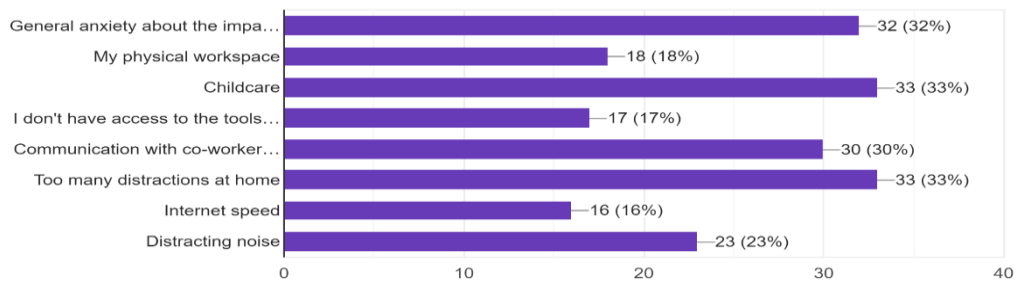
How concerned are you about cyber security when working remotely?
100 απαντήσεις

- Very concerned
- Slightly concerned
- A moderate amount
- Not at all
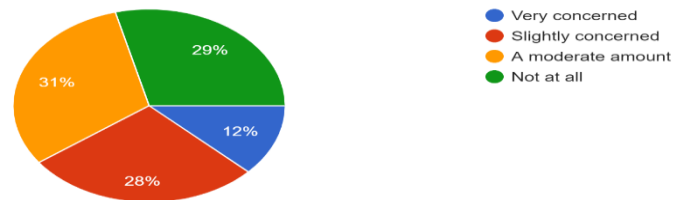
How easy are your communications with team members currently? I.e. transferring calls?
100 απαντήσεις

- Very easy
- Easy
- Neither easy nor difficult
- Difficult
- Very difficult