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AN EVALUATION ON REMOTE WORKING METHOD IN CONTEXT OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE, PRODUCTIVITY, TRUST AND FLEXIBILITY¹

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ABSTRACT

Due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 epidemic, the remote working method has become a necessity rather than a choice for businesses and employees. This compelling and sudden change in working life created new conditions. In turn, they have brought the factors affecting employee productivity as a determining factor in the success of businesses to the agenda again. In this context, this study aims to examine the impact of flexible working conditions, the environment of trust and work-life balance variables on employees' productivity with a focus on remote working methods. The cross-sectional survey method is used as a data collection and analysis method in the research. The data obtained from 571 people and collected by convenience sampling were analyzed through the SPSS 20 program. In light of its findings, it has been found that the variables of flexibility, trust environment, and work-life balance were related to the productivity variable and that the flexibility and trust environment variables had a high explanatory power for the productivity variable. Although the work-life balance variable has a negative relationship with productivity, it has been found that its explanatory power is low. The findings are very inspiring for future studies, as they reveal the role played by the remote working as a widely used method today on productivity.

Keywords: Remote Work, Flexibility, Trust, Work-Life Balance, Broductivity

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İŞ-YAŞAM DENGESİ, VERİMLİLİK, GÜVEN VE ESNEKLİK BAĞLAMINDA UZAKTAN ÇALIŞMA YÖNTEMİNİN DEĞERLENDİRİLMESİ

ÖZET

Covid-19 salgınından kaynaklı olarak, uzaktan çalışma yöntemi işletme çalışanlar için tercihten öte bir zorunluluk haline gelmiştir. Çalışma yaşamında bu zorlayıcı ve ani değisimin yaratmış olduğu yeni koşullar işletmelerin başarısında belirleyici olan çalışan verimliliğini etkileyen faktörleri unsur yeniden gündeme getirmiştir. Bu bağlamda çalışmanın amacı uzaktan çalışma yöntemi odağında esnek çalışma koşulları, güven ortamı ve iş yaşam dengesi değişkenlerinin çalışanların verimlilikleri üzerindeki etkisini incelemektir. Araştırmada veri toplama ve analiz yöntemi olarak nicel arastırma yöntemlerinden yararlanılarak kesitsel tarama yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Kolayda örnekleme ile toplanan 571 kişiden elde edilen veriler SPSS 20 program aracılığıyla analiz edilmiştir. Bulgular ışığında esneklik, güven ortamı ve iş-yaşam dengesi değişkenlerinin verimlilik değişkeni ile ilişkili olduğu, esneklik ve güven ortamı değişkenlerinin verimlilik değişkenini açıklayıcılık gücünün yüksek olduğu bulgulanmıştır. İş-yaşam dengesi değişkeninin ise verimlilik ile negatif yönlü ilişkiye sahip olmakla birlikte açıklayıcılık gücünün düşük olduğu bulgulanmıştır. Elde edilen bulgular günümüzde yaygın kullanım alanı bulan uzaktan çalışma yönteminin verimlilik üzerinde oynadığı rolü ortaya koyması sebebiyle daha sonra yapılacak çalışmalara fikir olması açısından önem arz etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Uzaktan Çalışma, Esneklik, Güven, İş-Yaşam Dengesi, Verimlilik

INTRODUCTION

In the aftermath of the global epidemic declared due to the New Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19), "remote working" method was started to be applied out of necessity due to the measures taken in our country as well as all over the world and this same method has gained importance in terms of reducing the negative effects of this process in public health and economy. Remote work is a work practice that encourages professionals to work beyond the traditional office environment. Its underlying foundation is the idea that there is no work that needs to be done in a particular place (Prasad et al., 2020).

In this period when remote working is on the agenda of all world economies, the way employees manage this process and its effect on the performance of companies are very crucial. At this point, a literature review shows that there are disadvantages as well as advantages for the remote working method. Its advantages include increased productivity by saving commute time and office resources for the workplace and employee; enhancing work-life balance and providing a more flexible lifestyle; reducing a significant source of stress for employees and being a time saver especially for employees whose arrival at the workplace takes a long time; running home

care or leisure activities; making their lives easier by organizing their work and non-work activities.

There are also disadvantages such as experiencing role conflict and disruption of work-life balance on the part of employees because he/she would try to deal with both occupational and domestic responsibilities at work, feeling insecure and unappreciated due to the lack of working face-to-face in an online environment, and feelin socially isolated due to lack of interaction with others.

The widespread use of the remote working method has been the subject of both academical and corporate studies. People have started to discuss the impact of remote work on motivation, productivity, commitment, trust, performance and many other individual and organizational factors. In the period people work remotely, the questions of how the employees will establish a work-life balance at home and how to establish trust between employees and the company are still a matter of debate. Individual performance plays a major role on corporate productivity and based on this fact, the study aims determine the relationship between various determining factors in the success of businesses such as work-life balance, trust, flexibility and performance in the remote working method which has become widespread as a result of Covid-19 epidemic. In this context, perceptions of the employees towards the remote working method were measured without excluding any sector and professional area in working life. Non-Interventional Research Ethics Committee in Istanbul Esenyurt University gave its ethical approval for the study (decision dated 17.06.2022 and numbered 2022/05-7). The analysis of the data obtained from the sample group of study was carried out through SPSS 20 program. Statistical tests to be used in the analysis of the data were determined by considering the questions and scales used in the study. According to the findings, there is a significant relationship between work-life balance, flexible working and trust variables and productivity. Additionally flexibility and trust environment variables were found to be highly effective on productivity.

1. THEORETICAL PREDICTIONS AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

1.1. Remote Working

Remote working is a work practice that encourages professionals to work beyond the traditional office environment. This practice is based on the idea that there is no work that needs to be done in a certain place (Prasad et al., 2020). The remote working method, which was not widely used before the pandemic, is a form of working that started out of necessity in the past two years and now became a routine practice.

When we look at different concepts of remote work in the literature, it is seen that there are transitions in its definitions, and there is an interchangeability between terms like "telework", "tele commuting", "virtual work". Although the remote working model varies according to

companies and their purposes, it is possible to apply this method at home or in other places if they have certain technological facilities (Soysal, 2006).

Although forms of application for remote working differ in the literature, forms of remote working are defined under three main headings (home-based remote working, central-based remote working and mobile remote working). These are:

-Home Based Remote Working: With the use of computers and communication technologies, home based remote working becomes a common practice. Instead of working in the office, working in a home with an office environment becomes very attractive to employees. One of the reasons why employees prefer home-based work is that they can adjust their own performance rates without any distress regarding an external intervention and warning, and that they can do this without having to leave their family lives behind (Soysal, 2006: 133).

-Central-Based Remote Working: "Tele villages" or "Tele centers" are centers equipped with computers and communication connections, where employees can work in a geographical location away from company headquarters and close to their home. It is similar to the traditional office environment. (Kandemir, 2011).

-Mobile Remote Working: Employees work by using information technology from different points and maintain their connections with their employers wherever they are. They work on the move, at home, in any place including cars, trains and planes, in hotels or in their clients' offices. These employees are called mobile teleworkers (Alkan, 2007:268).

The forms of remote working after the pandemic have made it necessary to switch to remote working practices in nearly all professions, and at this point general categorizations indicates three types of remote working models. Namely, they are *fully remote, partially remote and hybrid models*. Moreover, Figure 1 below shows that the models are divided into sub-dimensions depending on their communication types and workplace priority. However, it is argued that not only one model will be adopted in practice, and that they can be applied together depending on the situation (Ülkü, 2022: 24).

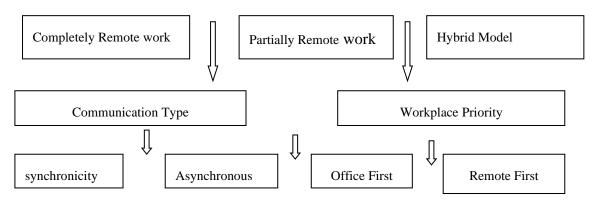


Figure 1. Post-Pandemic Remote Working Models

1.2. Work-Life Balance

The greatest advantage of remote working is enabling employees to customize their working hours in a way that perfects their work-life balance. Work-life balance affects the quality of working life and offers employees rights/flexibility in balancing occupational and domestic responsibilities. Studies suggest that working remotely can improve work-life balance without reducing productivity under certain conditions (Sullivan, 2012). If the home offers a quiet and convenient atmosphere for the employee to work, remote working may provide a better environment for at least some types of occupations. On the other hand Anderson and Kelliher (2022) have found that remote working at home is a source of stress since employee tries to deal with both his/her occupational and domestic roles at home and consequently a conflict of interest arises. Some of the important theories put forward for the establishment of work-life balance in the literature are Clark's "Work and Family Limit Theory", Blake E. Ashfrorth et al.'s "Limits and Micro Role Transitions", Ellen Ernest Kossek et al.'s "Work-Family Role Synthesis" (Kapız, 2002).

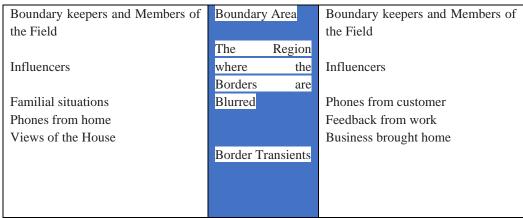


Figure 2: Work-Family Limit Theory: Basic Concepts and Characteristics of Concepts

Remote working allows employees to gain more control over work and family boundaries and to partially plan their time to meet domestic demands (Lal, 2009:258). However, on the other hand, there are many external factors (children, noise, etc.) that can limit employees during remote working and workplace offers an isolated and suitable atmosphere for such matters. According to the research conducted by Wang et al. in China, working parents had difficulties in balancing their occupational and domestic roles after the closure of schools during Coronavirus pandemic and their work occupied their living space during remote working. Similarly, in the employment of remote working method, significant differences were also recorded in the work-life balance depending on gender variable.

One of its important consequences is that women are more likely to experience more tension and uncertainty between their occupational and domestic lives than men (Anderson & Kelliher, 2020: 679). Yet the requirement of being always online reveals the difficulty of establishing a work-life balance for both parties (Wang, et al., 2021:28).

In this context, it can be said that the work-life balance combine with the remote working method would make individuals effectively productive. In this regard this hypothesis has been formulated: " H_1 : There is a significant relationship between employees' work-life balance and productivity."

1.3. Environment of Trust

Trust is seen as a necessary premise for cooperation and vital to long-term relationships. According to Luhman (2000), trust is a way of reducing social complexities. On the other hand for Zhou et al. (2005), trust generally refers to a bilateral relationship between two people: it expresses a person's confidence, belief and expectation that another person will act or intend to act in a beneficial way. As there is no clear definition of trust, its conception cannot be considered separately from variables such as cooperation and familiarity, since its characteristic dimensions overlap with each other. Therefore, the feeling of trust allows to exhibit a cooperative behavior and attitude.

Just as building trust is difficult in personal relationships it is complex to build trusting relationships in working life. In the context of profession life, behaviors based on competence and goodwill are necessary for development of mutual trust (Blomqvist, 1997). As Table 1 indicates, the foundations of trust building are based on competence, goodwill and behaviors. In this context, some routines, practices and processes that can be used to build trust are detailed in following tables (Blomqvist & Ståhle, 2000).

Factor	Key Feature	Routines To Build Trust, Applications and Processes
Competence	Technical Skills and Knowledge	Realistic Reasoning, Solidity of Vision, Reputation, Professionalism
Goodwill	Moral Responsibility and Positive Intentions Towards Others	Internal Information Flow, Maintaining Equity, Negotiation Style (Win-Win), Consistency in Management, Keeping Promises, Socialization, Personal Interaction, Diversity Management, Social Support and Recognition, Trainings, Visibility
Behaviour	Cognition and Experience- Based Interaction	Openness and frequency of communication, Advice and consultation, Sharing future plans for the partner, Social Support, Trustworthy commitments, Reputation management

Table 1: Foundations of Trust

The development of an environment of trust is based on mutual openness and communication. While the institution wishing to build trust demonstrates this with its organizational actions, employees increase the quality of this relationship with their individual attitudes and behaviors (Blomqvist and Ståhle, 2000). Within this framework, an environment of trust provided in the remote working method will be effective on the productivity of employees. In this context this hypothesis has been formulated:

" H_2 : There is a significant relationship between the employees' perceived environment of trust and their productivity."

1.4. Flexible Working

Flexible working is a working method that has positive and negative consequences for employees and their families as well as employers and society in general. Job flexibility is a practice in which employees are employed by enabling them to allocate resources between work place and external areas according to their preferences (Golden, 2008). For example, employees with access to flexible work schedules can alleviate some of chronic time pressures and conflicts imposed by their external responsibilities. Employees seek flexibility to meet their personal and domestic needs, including child care, aged care, school education and health care. Current research supports that job flexibility in terms of location and working hours gives employees some sense of job control, improves their commitment and increases job satisfaction, thus improving their health and well-being (Kossek, 2015; Halpern, 2005).

Bond and Galinsky (2011) state that both high and low paid employees value job flexibility in terms of work schedule and this flexibility makes a statistically significant contribution to their engagement with work and their job satisfaction. Golden (2008) argues that flexibility is positively related to happiness. Kim et al. (2020), on the other hand, examined the relationships between flexibility as measured by flexible schedules and working at home, and employee well-being as measured by job satisfaction, job stress, daily fatigue, and work-family conflict. Then they have found that flexible schedules have some benefits but determined that working at home to finish the job before the deadline have disadvantages for well-being of employees. Furthermore, the authors concluded that there are potential advantages and undesirable consequences of different flexibility arrangements for employees and that these effects may differ by gender (Kim et al., 2020). Additional current evidence supports that some work-family conflicts associated with flexible working outweigh the benefits of flexible working schedule, and blurring of boundaries between professional and non-professional life may have negative consequences for employees and their families (Almer & Kaplan, 2002).

It is important to note that employees have the opportunity to choose where they will work in the remote working method and that a perception of autonomy is an important factor in explaining the positive results of remote working. However, working at home during the pandemic-related curfew did not offer such an option and as a result, employees were found to be less likely to perceive greater autonomy or feel grateful to their employers for allowing them to work remotely from the workforce (Anderson and Kelliher, 2020:679). Nonetheless, during periods of total closures such as pandemics, flexible working method is an important source of advantage from a social viewpoint; particularly location-space flexibility can provide short or long-term operational continuity when workplace closures are necessary. Within this framework it is predicted that flexible working schedules would increase productivity. In that regard this hypothesis has been formulated: "H3: There is a significant relationship between employees' perception of flexible working and their productivity."

Drawing on the literature, the following hypothesis has been formulated in order to measure the possible relations and the level of influence between the remote working method and main determinants of variables such as productivity and performance, that is concepts of work-life balance, flexible working and environment of trust:

"H4: Employees' work-life balance, flexible working and perceived trust environment have a significant impact on their productivity."

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Methodology, Sample and Employed Scales

The study has an explanatory approach due to its purpose. The research is a quantitative study in terms of data collection and analysis method. The research has a cross-sectional scanning method in terms of the time it covers. For the sample calculation, it has based on Yazıcıoğlu and Erdoğan's (2004: 50) assessment that a sample size with 384 is sufficient for the population size of 1 million and above in calculations of sample sizes that should be drawn from different universes with a sampling error of +- 0.05 for α = 0.05. The study reached employees by means of *convenience sampling* and sent them a questionnaire via e-mail. As a result 571 usable questionnaires were received. In order to measure the perception on remote working in the study, Grant et al.'s"E-Work Life (EWL)" scale consisting of 17 questions and four sub-dimensions was translated into Turkish and redesigned in accordance with the COVID-19 process. These four sub-dimensions are as follows: *productivity, flexibility, environment of trust, work-life balance*.

2.2. Research Findings

This quantitative research performed a normal distribution test was with SPSS 20 program in order to test the research model and then conducted validity and reliability tests for variables. Correlation and regression analyzes were then performed to test research hypotheses.

2.2.1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics

The socio-demographic characteristics of the employees participated in our research are as follows: 427 of the 571 people in total are men and 144 are women. There is no limitation related to the profession, and there are also many professions such as engineers, academicians, lawyers, sales personnel, doctors, teachers, etc in the research. In terms of their marital status 349 of them are single and 222 of them are married. In terms of their education level, 47 of the participants are high school graduates, 81 are associate degree graduates, 325 have university degrees and 118 have post-graduate degrees. There are 57 employees in the age group 18-15, 204 in 26-25, 301 in 36-45, 79 in 54 and over.

2.2.2. Factor And Reliability Analyzes Of Variables

The study employs *alpha* model in applications of exploratory factor analysis and reliability analysis. In this regard, Table 2 details the results of analysis applied for variables respectively.

Table 2: Factor and reliability analysis results for the variables under examination

Factor	Cronbach
Loading	Alpha
0,687	0,802
0,836	0.790
0,854	0,79
0,871	0,789
0,582	0,806
0,881	0,788
0,624	0,797
0,599	0,796
	0,687 0,836 0,854 0,871 0,582 0,881

My line manager allows me to flex my hours to meet my needs, providing all the work is completed.	0,577	0,793
Trust		
My organisation provides training in e-working skills and behaviours.	0,686	0,806
My organisation trusts me to be effective in my role when I e-work remotely.	-0,542	0,807
I trust my organisation to provide good e-working facilities to allow me to e-work effectively.	0,641	0,795
Work Life Balance		
My e-working takes up time that I would like to spend with my family/friends or on other non-work activities.	0,771	0,838
When e-working remotely I often think about work-related problems outside of my normal working hours.	0,767	0,827
I am happy with my work life balance when e-working remotely.	0,739	0,791
Constant access to work through e-working is very tiring.	0,644	0,826
My social life is poor when e-working remotely.	0,732	0,829
%Variance Explained:63,188		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy=0,885 Chi-Square Bartlett's Test=5438,811		

2.3. Hypothesis Testing

Correlation and regression analyzes were applied to test afore-mentioned hypotheses in research model. In this context, Table 3 summarizes results of Pearson correlation analysis regarding the relationship between flexibility, work-life balance, the environment of trust and productivity.

Table 3: Results of Correlation Analysis

		Productivity	Work-Life Balance	Trust	Flexibility
	PearsonCorrelation	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)				
Productivity	N	571			
	Pearson Correlation	-,160**	1		
Work-Life	Sig. (2-tailed)	0			
Balance	N	571	571		
	Pearson Correlation	,653**	,096*	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0,022		
Trust	N	571	571	571	
	Pearson Correlation	,712**	,160**	,653**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0	0	
Flexibility	N	571	571	571	571
**. Correlatio	n is significant at the 0.0	1 level (2-tailed).			
*. Correlation	is significant at the 0.05	level (2-tailed).			

As Table 3 demonstrates, there is a positive and significant relationship between the employees' perceptions towards environment of trust and flexible working opportunities and productivity. Given the absolute values of correlation coefficients, there is a high level of correlation between variables. However, it has been found that there is a low negative correlation between work-life balance and productivity. Thus, it confirms H1 and H2 hypotheses. After correlation analysis, regression analysis was performed to test the H3 hypothesis. Table 4 presents analysis results.

Trust Flexibility Work-Life Balance Beta t (P value) Beta t (P value) Beta t (P value) Productivity 0,712 0.00 0,653 -0,1560.00 0.00 F 585,067 421,065 14,102 \mathbb{R}^2 0,507 0,426 0,024 Adjusted R² 0,506 0,425 0,022 **0.01 significance level

Table 4: Results of Regression Analysis

As Table 4 points out, flexibility variable is 50.7%, and the confidence environment is 42.6%, with a significance level of 0.01. In the light of standardized coefficients in regression analysis, lexibility variable is the one that explains the productivity variable in a most efficient way. Thus, H3 variable is confirmed.

3. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This research aims to measure perceptions of 571 employees who have remote working experiences in different sectors, towards work-life balance, flexibility, trust and productivity. Also it seeks to reveal the relationship between these variables. 571 data items collected through EWL scale were analyzed by means of a statistical program named SPSS.20. Broadly speaking, findings indicate that remote working affects productivities of remote workers and their work-life balance. Moreover, in the part of employees the higher the perception that the work is carried out in a supportive and reliable organization, the higher the satisfaction with the working method. According to previous studies, remote working experience is associated with productivity (Bloom et al., 2015), organizational trust (Bentley et al., 2016), good relations with the organization (Golden, 2012), and work-life balance (Gajendran and Harrison, 2007). In a similar vein, literature suggests that remote online working have many benefits. Its positive effects include improved productivity, flexibility at work, better work-life balance, as well as a reduction in the need to commute every day (Grant et al., 2013; Fonner and Roloff, 2010). In particular, teleworkers reported higher levels of job satisfaction due to its advantages (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007).

Although current studies indicate that remote workers report increased job satisfaction (Bloom et al, 2015), others have found an association between teleworking and lower well-being. One of the factors that results in low well-being is workload or overwork, potentially representing a serious factor for mental health (Grant et al., 2013; Kelliher and Anderson, 2010; Derks et al., 2015). This ultimately affects business effectiveness and performance (Grant et al., 2013; Fonner & Roloff, 2010; Barber & Santuzzi, 2015).

A negative relationship has been found between work-life balance and work productivity. The deterioration of work-life balance indicates a decrease in the productivity of employees. This result suggests that, the practice itself is associated with increased stress since many employees and firms experienced remote working during coronavirus epidemics (Chesley, 2014). Also they feel a moral responsibility to compensate for the flexibility allowed by the organization and therefore increased their workflow. Since increased workflow ultimately affects satisfaction (Chesley, 2010) remote working serves as a major source of pressure and stress.

This study have found that all of three variables have significant effect on the productivity of remote workers; however the most important factor is flexibility and trust follows it. In general these findings confirm the interaction between characteristics of remote working and remote workers' attitudes towards this type of working.

Because EWL scale works at three levels, that is individual, managerial, and organizational levels, it could enable us to understand major issues related to remote working. At the same time, it is recommended that future studies should focus on the relationship between work-life balance and productivity. The study also suggests to examine a model in which these factors will be included in future studies, assuming that a flexible environment and trust affects productivity positively and that work-life balance is shaped under the impact of many factors such as stress, performance pressure or domestic balances.

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APPENDICES

App. 1: E-Work Life (EWL) Questionare Turkish Version

Engilish Question	Turkish Question		
Factor 1:Productivity	Factor 1:Verimlilik		
I know what it takes to be an effective e-worker	Evden çalışma sırasında çalışmayı ne zaman durduracağımı biliyorum ve dinlenebiliyorum.		
I feel that work demands are much higher when I am e-working remotely.	Evden çalışma sırasında iş talebinin çok daha yüksek olduğunu hissediyorum		
When e-working I can concentrate better on my work tasks.	Evden çalışma sırasında işle ilgili sorumluluklarıma daha iyi konsantre olabiliyorum		
E-working makes me more effective to deliver against my key objectives and deliverables.	Evden çalışma, temel hedeflerime ve çıktılarıma karşı daha etkili olmamı sağlıyor		
If I am interrupted by family/other responsibilities whilst e-working from home, I still meet my line manager's quality expectations.	Evden çalışma sırasında aile veya diğer sorumluluklar tarafından bölünsem de çalışanların/yöneticilerin kalite beklentilerini yine de karşılarım		
My overall job productivity has increased by my ability to e-work remotely/from home.	Evden çalışma becerim sayesinde genel iş verimliliğim arttı		
Flexibility	Esneklik		
My supervisor gives me total control over when and how I get my work completed when e-working.	Evden çalışma sırasında iş yerimdeki yöneticiler işlerin ne zaman ve nasıl tamamlandığını eksiksiz bir şekilde kontrol ediyor		
My work is so flexible I could easily take time off e-working remotely, if and when I want to.	İşim o kadar esnek ki istediğim zaman evden çalışabilirim		
My line manager allows me to flex my hours to meet my needs, providing all the work is completed.	Yöneticim/çalışanlar tüm işin tamamlanması koşuluyla ihtiyaçlarımı karşılamam için saatlerimi esnetmeme imkan sağlıyor		
Trust	Güven		
My organisation provides training in e- working skills and behaviours.	İş yerim evden çalışma becerileri ve davranışları konusunda eğitim vermektedir		
My organisation trusts me to be effective in my role when I e-work remotely.	Evden çalışma sürecinde görevimde verimli olmam için bağlı olduğum kurum bana güveniyor		
I trust my organisation to provide good e- working facilities to allow me to e-work effectively.	Etkin bir şekilde çalışmam için evden çalışma olanakları sağlama konusunda bağlı olduğum kuruma güveniyorum		
Work Life Balance	İş-Yaşam Dengesi		
My e-working takes up time that I would like to spend with my family/friends or on other non-work activities.	Evden çalışmam ailemle/arkadaşlarımla veya diğer iş dışı faaliyetlerle harcamak istediğim zamanı alıyor		
When e-working remotely I often think about work-related problems outside of my normal working hours.	Evden çalışırken işle ilgili sorunları mesai saatlerimin dışında sıklıkla düşünüyorum		
I am happy with my work life balance when e-working remotely.	Evden çalışma sürecinde iş hayatı dengemden memnunum		