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Gender Differences in Work Satisfaction, Work Engagement and Work Efficiency of Employees during the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Case in Slovenia

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Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic and the resultant lockdown has caused massive economic disruption, leading businesses to make a rapid transition and take a new approach to business strategy. Therefore, the aim of the paper is to examine if there are statistically significant gender differences in work satisfaction, work engagement, and work efficiency among employees who work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, the paper aims to identify the importance of individual dimensions of work satisfaction, work engagement, and work efficiency, and gender differences perspective. The research is based on a survey of 785 employees in Slovenian companies. The factor analysis and the *t*-test for two independent samples were used to test the research hypotheses. Findings: The results show significant gender differences in work satisfaction, work engagement, and work efficiency among employees who work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper provides change management insights and recommendations to assist companies in minimizing the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their employees.

Keywords: work satisfaction; work engagement; work efficiency; employees; COVID-19



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1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly changed our lives, causing tremendous human suffering and challenging the most basic foundations of societal well-being. Beyond the immediate impacts on health, jobs, and incomes, the pandemic increases people's anxiety and worry, affecting their social relations, trust in other people and institutions, personal security, and sense of belonging [1]. The pandemic has dramatically increased the percentage of employees who work from home and may accelerate the reliance on telecommuting in the future. Digital collaboration impacts the productivity and happiness of employees, and both issues are related to sustainability. At the same time, they are closely related to work satisfaction, work engagement, and work efficiency as very important factors of a sustainable organizational environment. Still, working from home during COVID-19 is more challenging than doing so at other times [2]. People feel increased anxiety about the economy, the risk of job loss, and the coronavirus spread. Those who live alone are especially likely to feel lonely. Parents, especially mothers, have greater childcare responsibilities, and these reduce work hours [3,4]. Productivity is not likely to be enhanced under these conditions. Moreover, not all employees prefer working from home, even when given a choice to do so [2], and people currently have little choice [5]. The pandemic has generally created challenges for women's advancement. More women than men have lost their jobs, more women than men are in essential jobs that expose them to infection and psychological stress, and women have had more work disruption than men because of increases in childcare and other responsibilities [6,7]. On the other hand, telecommuting has increased men's amount of childcare, which can increase men's childcare responsibilities in the long term, thereby reducing the gender gap in domestic responsibilities and

increasing gender equality [3]. According to OECD, women are potentially more exposed to material hardships associated with the economic fallout from COVID-19 [8]. In the very short term, some sectors of the economy will likely be more affected than others [8]. Most immediately, industries that rely on travel and physical interaction with customers will inevitably be hit hard. This includes air travel, tourism, accommodation services (e.g., hotels), food and beverage service activities (e.g., cafés, restaurants, and catering), and retail activities where women are overrepresented [6]. In general, women are likely to be more vulnerable than men to any crisis-driven loss of income, as women's levels of incomes are, on average, lower than men's, and their poverty rates are higher [1,7]. They also often hold less wealth than men for a variety of reasons. Women may find it more difficult to secure alternative employment and income streams (such as piecemeal work) following a lay-off due to greater caring obligations [1]. Moreover, women are shouldering much of the burden at home, given school and childcare facility closures and longstanding gender inequalities in unpaid work [8]. The COVID-19 pandemics created a profound shock worldwide, with different implications for men and women. Due to persistent gender inequalities across many dimensions, women's jobs, businesses, incomes, and wider living standards may be more exposed than men's to the anticipated widespread economic fallout from the crisis. COVID-19 will amplify women's unpaid work burdens. For example, the widespread closure of schools and childcare facilities will increase the amount of time that parents must spend on childcare and child supervision and force many to supervise or lead homeschooling. Much of this additional burden is likely to fall on women. Fulfilling these demands will be difficult for many parents, especially for those that are required to continue working [1,6,8]. Overall, the pandemic has increased men's domestic responsibilities, but not as much as women's [3]. As a result, fathers have more quality time to devote to their jobs than mothers do. Thus, relative to fathers, the pandemic has undermined mothers' productivity and performance [3]. Additionally, this leads to lower work satisfaction, lower work engagement and lower work efficiency during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Therefore, the paper aims to examine if there are statistically significant gender differences in work satisfaction, work engagement, and work efficiency among employees who work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, the aim of the paper is to identify the importance of individual dimensions of work satisfaction, work engagement, and work efficiency, also from a gender differences perspective, during the COVID-19 pandemic, which will especially contribute to the adequate management of employees during the COVID-19 pandemic and also after the pandemic, if companies adopt widespread work-from-home policies.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses

2.1. Gender Differences and Teleworking during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Feng and Savani used a sample of 286 employed women and men who were working from home since COVID-19 lockdowns started. It is found that before the COVID-19 pandemic, there were no gender differences in self-rated work efficiency and work satisfaction. During the lockdown, women reported lower work efficiency and work satisfaction than men [9]. Although telecommuting practices typically provide more flexibility, they can give rise to more housework—particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the unavailability of domestic help, couples who were before fortunate enough to hire domestic help would now have to do all the domestic work themselves [10]. Given the closure of schools, daycare centers, and the restriction of house visits by nannies, the situation is made even more difficult for working parents, who now also have to take care of their children while juggling daily work tasks. For affected families, parental burnout is a common outcome arising from managing the logistics and time commitment of homeschooling and distance learning [11]. More specifically, although women can handle an additional hour or two of housework each day than men by sacrificing their leisure time and without affecting work, an additional hour or two of housework on top of that might exceed a critical threshold and

end up interfering with women's work. However, as men spend less time on housework to begin with, an additional hour or two of housework might not have as big of a negative effect on their work [9]. According to Adisa et al., the COVID-19 lockdown has intensified women's workload and has caused unbridled role conflict (family–work conflict), which has further been exacerbated by structural and interactional roles undertaken by women, especially during the lockdown [12]. Remote working has contributed to women's role congestion and role conflict and poses severe challenges to role differentiation [13]. Bahn et al. [14] and Nash and Churchill [13] emphasize that women continue to struggle with juggling work and family responsibilities even while they are working from home, which has resulted in increased stress levels and inter-role conflicts as the blurring of borders have intensified. Adisa et al. found that the increase in employees' work demands and their familial duties, as a result of the COVID-19 lockdown, has exacerbated their role conflict. The lockdown has meant that work and familial duties now take place at home, thus making separation of the roles difficult and enhancing the proliferation of role conflict. Women have undertaken more domestic duties during the lockdown compared to the pre-COVID-19 period [12]. According to Savage, the COVID-19 situation has created significant frustration for women, as they have shouldered the bulk of domestic duties. The participants also undertake the new role of "assistant teacher" by helping their children with remote schoolwork. These phenomena have affected the majority of women and have resulted in their work–family balance temporarily being on hold [15]. Horton [16] and Lyon [17] found that employee parents, during the lockdown, find the workload and the job of supervising their children's home-schooling frustrating.

In addition, the results across EU states suggest that women face high stress during the COVID-19 pandemic [18]. Kavčič et al., in their research in Slovenia, found that consequences of the pandemic and lockdown, such as financial challenges, increased informal care of children and their schooling as well as sick family members, and decreased employment opportunities, could be more detrimental for women than men [19]. There is not much research that is based on gender differences during the COVID-19 pandemic in Slovenia; therefore, we wanted to fill this gap.

2.2. Work Satisfaction during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Work satisfaction is an attitude or emotional response to all aspects related to a person's job [20]. Employees' working satisfaction is very important to enable an employee to bring out the maximum ability for their job [21]. Employees with a high level of working satisfaction are known to show a positive attitude towards their work, while employees who are not satisfied with their work are known to show negative attitudes towards their work [22]. However, the emphasis on employee satisfaction should be even more important during the COVID-19 pandemic [23]. The large-scale closure of childcare facilities and schools now implemented in an increasing number of OECD countries is likely to cause considerable difficulty for many working parents. Moreover, a further complication is that grandparents, who are often relied on as informal care providers, are particularly vulnerable and are required to minimize close contact with others, notably with children. Without family networks to rely on, many working parents will have few options other than caring for their children at home [8]. Teleworking could provide a partial solution for some working parents, but teleworking full office hours can be very difficult if not impossible in practice, notably for families with young children, couples where only one partner can telework, and single parents [4,24]. Furthermore, Carli emphasizes that women, regardless of employment status, spend more time caring for children and other household duties than men do [3]. Moreover, the study found that mothers devote fewer hours to their jobs among employed parents than fathers do. In addition, interruptions to women's paid work hours have increased much more than men's [25]. In addition, women more often provide unpaid care for elderly relatives. All of these responsibilities have been exacerbated by the pandemic [3]. This reflects differences between men and women in their work flexibility, which leads to less work satisfaction [26]. According to Feng and Savani,

during the COVID-19 pandemic, women perceived lower work satisfaction than men because their higher household demands interfere with work [9]. Thus, we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): *There are significant gender differences regarding work satisfaction among employees who work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic in Slovenia.*

2.3. Work Engagement during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The work engagement concept was developed in combination with the job demands–resources (JD-R) model [27]. At the heart of this model lies the assumption that all aspects of work environments can be categorized into job demands and job resources that either positively or negatively affect work engagement [27]. From the main idea of the JD-R model, it can be deduced that it is a general model developed within the realm of positive psychology [28]. Moreover, the job demands–resources model of work engagement (JD-R model) was introduced about fifteen years ago to understand burnout, a chronic state of work-related psychological stress that is characterized by exhaustion (i.e., feeling emotionally drained and used up), mental distancing (i.e., cynicism and lack of enthusiasm), and reduced personal efficacy (i.e., doubting about one's competence and contribution at work). After some years the model was supplemented with work engagement, a positive, fulfilling psychological state that is characterized by vigor (i.e., high levels of energy and resilience), dedication (i.e., experiencing a sense of significance, pride, and challenge), and absorption (i.e., being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one's work) [29]. Thus, work engagement refers to an active energetic state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption [30].

Employee engagement is recognized as an important element of effectiveness in a company [31]. Therefore, employees' work engagement is especially important during the COVID-19 pandemic [32]. Engaged employees will look for better ways to get their work done, use resources efficiently, and reduce daily activity time. Employee engagement refers to the extent to which employees feel deeper about their work. This makes the organization more transparent, allowing employees to simultaneously access several information sources [23]. Data from a survey conducted by Monash Alfred Psychiatry research center indicates that women in Australia are experiencing higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress than men in response to the COVID-19 pandemic [33]. Preliminary analysis of data collected between April 3 and May 3 on 1495 adults (82% female) has found: 39% of females have moderate to severe levels of psychological distress compared to 31% of males; 35% of females have moderate to severe levels of depression, compared to 19% of males; 27% of females have moderate to severe levels of stress, compared to 10% of males; 21% of females have moderate to severe levels of anxiety, compared to 9% of males [33]. The ABS Household Impacts of COVID-19 Survey indicates that women are significantly more likely than men to have experienced negative mental health impacts [34]. These findings are consistent with data from the US and Canada showing that women are more likely to experience negative mental health impacts than men due to COVID-19 [35]. A study of 8000 people in the US has found that mental health has declined only among women during COVID-19, increasing the existing gender gap in mental health by 66%. Other survey data from Canada and the US suggest that women are more likely to report that worry or stress related to COVID-19 has had a major negative impact on their mental health and, consequently, their work engagement. According to Innstrand et al., stress, anxiety, and depression lead to lower work engagement [36]. According to Gupta, women are burdened during the COVID-19 pandemic, which reduced their work engagement [37]. Additionally, compared to men, women felt more emotional exhaustion due to personal life interference in work during work from home. Hu et al. found that the COVID-19 pandemic causes anxiety in many employees, which can lead to a significant reduction in their work engagement [38]. According to this, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 2 (H2): *There are significant gender differences regarding work engagement among employees who work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic in Slovenia.*

2.4. Work Efficiency during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Women's predominance as essential employees places them at greater risk of stress, burnout, and impaired mental health. When combined with women's greater unemployment rate and increased domestic duties, it is not surprising that women report more emotional distress than men. Based on nationally representative data in the USA, more women than men report feeling nervous, anxious, or on the edge, and down, depressed, or hopeless at least some of the time [39]. Other national representative surveys have revealed greater mental health issues among women than men in Cambodia, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Thailand [40]. Thus, the psychological challenges of COVID-19 are likely contributing to reduced work efficiency and impaired performance [3]. Donnelly and Johns summarize that some employees working remote tend to overwork themselves by spending long hours on work than they usually do only at the office during normal working hours [41]. Although telecommuting practices typically provide more flexibility, they can give rise to more housework—particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic [9]. Parent burnout is a common outcome of managing the logistics and time commitment of homeschooling and distance learning [11]. According to Feng and Savani COVID-19 pandemic has led to lower work efficiency among women [9]. Aderonke et al., in their research on 466 employees in Nigeria, found that during the COVID-19 pandemic, employees said that the home environment is not conducive for their work efficiency [42]. Furthermore, employees noted that lockdown had not improved their work efficiency compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic. Employees also reported that taking care of their families and homeschooling children reduced their work efficiency during the COVID-19 pandemic [42]. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 3 (H3): *There are significant gender differences regarding work efficiency among employees who work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic in Slovenia.*

3. Methodology

3.1. Data and Sample

The main survey, conducted from June to August 2020 involved 170 randomly selected companies in Slovenia, and from each company, up to five employees participated in our research. Therefore, our empirical research includes 785 employees who participated in the survey during the COVID-19 pandemic. Regarding the age structure, the survey consists of 10.7% of employees aged from 26 to 31 years, 12.5% employees aged from 32 to 37 years, 14.7% employees aged from 38 to 43 years, 18.6% employees aged from 44 to 49, 19.6% employees aged from 50 to 55 years, 17.3% employees aged from 56 to 61 years, and 6.6% employees aged over 62 years. Regarding gender, 52.1% of women and 47.9% of men were involved. The companies in which employees are employed were from manufacturing (17.7%); information and communication activities (15.7%); professional, scientific, and technical activities (15.4%); trade, maintenance, and repair of motor vehicles (15.3%); financial and insurance activities (14.9%); health and social care (7.1%); other diversified business activities (5.7%); real estate business (3.7%), catering (1.7%); construction (1.4%); transport and storage (0.9%); and other activities (0.5%).

The response rate was 85%. The questionnaire was addressed to the owner/manager of the company and sent via e-mail.

3.2. Research Instrument

For the research instrument, we used a questionnaire (closed type). Items for work satisfaction were adopted from Hayday [43]. Items for the work engagement were adopted from Robinson et al. [44] and Gallup [45]. Items for the perceived reduction in work efficiency were adopted from Aderonke et al. [42] and Stergiou and Farmaki [46]. The

respondents indicated their agreement to the listed statements on a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1—completely disagree to 5—completely agree.

3.3. Statistical Analysis

In the first step, we analyzed gender differences on the level of items—individual statements about each construct (work satisfaction, work engagement, and work efficiency) among employees during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk [47] tests show that data is not normally distributed ($p < 0.001$) for all items that describe each construct; therefore, we used the non-parametric Mann–Whitney U test for two independent samples.

In the second step, we analyzed gender differences on the level of constructs—the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used. We used EFA because the research instrument was adopted from more authors and, therefore, we wanted to obtain a factor for each construct. To establish if the use of EFA is reasonable, Kaiser suggests that the value of Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin statistics be greater or equal to 0.5 ($KMO \geq 0.5$) [48]. Hair et al. suggests accepting that values between 0.5 and 0.7 are mediocre, values between 0.7 and 0.8 are good, and from 0.8 to 0.9 are meritorious [49]. The reasonableness of EFA was additionally tested by Bartlett’s test of sphericity ($p < 0.05$), to test the hypothesis that the correlation matrix of correlation coefficients among items, is a unit matrix. Based on EFA results, we eliminated those items whose commonalities were lower than 0.40 [50]. Hair et al. suggest the minimum level for factor loadings 0.30; factor loadings larger than 0.40 are marked as important, and factor loadings that are larger than 0.50 are marked as statistically significant [51]. The Varimax factor rotation was used in the case of more than one extracted factor.

The gender differences among employees during the COVID-19 pandemic were tested with the t-test for two independent samples.

4. Results

As already mentioned, the Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk test show that data is not normally distributed ($p < 0.001$) for all items that describe factors work satisfaction, work engagement, and work efficiency. Therefore, we used the non-parametric Mann–Whitney U test. Tables 1–3 show descriptive statistics and gender differences in all three constructs’ items among employees during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and statistically significant gender differences in work satisfaction among employees during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Item	Women		Men		Mann-Whit. U	Asymp. Sig. (2-Tail)
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.		
I am satisfied with						
the working hours and distribution of work obligations during the COVID-19.	3.291	0.911	3.829	1.011	54,156.5	0.000
the possibilities of training or education during the COVID-19.	3.215	1.092	3.226	1.122	75,392.0	0.672
the flexible working hours during the COVID-19.	3.397	0.972	3.728	0.966	62,082.0	0.000
the balance between my work and private life during the COVID-19.	3.194	1.178	3.923	1.072	50,589.5	0.000
the level of self-regulation of work speed that is enabled during the COVID-19.	3.432	1.050	3.786	0.930	61,642.5	0.000

Table 1. Cont.

Item	Women		Men		Mann-Whit. U	Asymp. Sig. (2-Tail)
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.		
enabling the flexible workspace (working from home) during the COVID-19.	3.718	1.171	3.864	0.902	71,175.5	0.070
all the flexible forms of work that the company allows me during the COVID-19.	3.517	1.211	3.701	1.129	69,973.0	0.028
the leadership during the COVID-19.	3.683	1.090	3.742	1.096	73,925.0	0.366

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and statistically significant gender differences in work engagement among employees during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Item	Women		Men		Mann-Whit. U	Asymp. Sig. (2-Tail)
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.		
I do my work with passion during the COVID-19.	3.476	1.041	3.723	0.962	65,191.5	0.000
I am engaged in the quality of my work during the COVID-19.	3.652	1.190	3.844	1.129	70,299.0	0.036
I am engaged in achieving successful business results during the COVID-19.	3.548	1.232	3.817	1.108	65,369.0	0.000
I feel the connection with the company in which I worked.	3.696	1.109	3.735	1.076	76,223.5	0.879
I am aware of the importance of innovation for our company, and I am helping to develop the company during the COVID-19.	3.461	1.272	3.742	1.088	70,498.5	0.043
I trust in my colleagues and the manager.	3.673	1.167	3.731	1.050	76,213.0	0.876
I feel that my work and job are important.	3.704	1.086	3.759	1.039	75,144.0	0.612

Table 3. Descriptive statistics and statistically significant gender differences in the perceived reduction in work efficiency among employees during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Item	Women		Men		Mann-Whit. U	Asymp. Sig. (2-Tail)
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.		
Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I am more exposed to stress than in normal working circumstances.	4.028	0.942	3.234	1.109	44,708.5	0.000
Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I am more exposed to depressed feelings than in normal working circumstances.	3.843	0.920	3.106	1.173	48,925.0	0.000
Due to the COVID-19 epidemic, I do less work than in normal working circumstances.	3.976	0.949	3.051	1.155	42,903.5	0.000

Table 3. Cont.

Item	Women		Men		Mann-Whit. U	Asymp. Sig. (2-Tail)
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.		
Due to changes in working conditions during the COVID-19, my motivation to work declined.	3.954	1.002	3.423	1.118	56,376.0	0.000
Due to changes in working conditions during the COVID-19, my work satisfaction declined.	3.938	1.296	3.265	1.400	55,700.0	0.000
Due to changes in working conditions during the COVID-19, my work engagement declined.	3.962	1.021	3.349	1.131	53,339.0	0.000
Due to the inability to cooperate with each other due to the COVID-19 epidemic, my willingness to work decreased.	3.475	1.279	3.453	1.383	76,276.5	0.894
Due to changes in working conditions during the COVID-19, it is difficult for me to concentrate at work than in normal working circumstances.	3.829	1.026	3.137	1.146	50,881.0	0.000
Due to changes in working conditions during the COVID-19, the quality of my work decreased as in normal working circumstances.	4.073	0.969	3.384	1.332	54,778.5	0.000

The results in Table 1 indicate that, on average, the work satisfaction characteristics among female employees during the COVID-19 pandemic are perceived lower than work satisfaction among male employees. The mean values in Table 1 show that for female employees, on average, the highest agreement was with satisfaction regarding enabling the flexible workspace (working from home). Female employees are also, on average, satisfied with the leadership and all the flexible work forms that the company allows during the COVID-19 pandemic. On the other hand, the lowest average satisfaction by women was perceived regarding satisfaction with the balance between work and private life during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, in contrast to women, male employees were the most satisfied with the balance between work and private life during the COVID-19 pandemic. On the other side of the scale, male employees are less satisfied with the possibilities of training or education during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of the Mann–Whitney U test show that there are statistically significant gender differences in perceived work satisfaction among employees, except in satisfaction with the leadership, satisfaction with enabling the flexible workspace (working from home) and satisfaction with the possibilities of training or education during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is important to notice that women are, on average, less satisfied than male employees, which holds for every characteristic of work satisfaction (Table 1).

The results in Table 2 indicate that, on average, the work engagement characteristics among female employees during the COVID-19 pandemic are perceived lower than work engagement among male employees. The mean values in Table 2 show that for female employees, on average, the highest agreement was with the statement that they feel that their work and job are important. Still, on the other hand, on average, they had the lowest agreement with the statement that they do their work with passion during the COVID-19 pandemic. In contrast to women, on average, male employees had the highest agreement with the statement that they engage in the quality of their work during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of the Mann–Whitney U test showed that there are statistically significant gender differences in work engagement characteristics among employees, except

for three items. These items were: “I feel the connection with the company in which I worked”, “I trust in my colleagues and the manager”, and “I feel that my work and job are important”. Again, women perceive lower levels of engagement, which holds for every characteristic of the work engagement (Table 2).

Table 3 shows descriptive statistics and statistically significant gender differences in perceived reduction in work efficiency among employees during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The results in Table 3 indicate that, on average, the perceived reduction in work efficiency among female employees during the COVID-19 pandemic is expressed higher than work efficiency among male employees. Moreover, Table 3 shows that, on average, female employees agreed the most with the two statements: “Due to changes in working conditions during the COVID-19, the quality of my work decreased as in normal working circumstances” and also, “Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I am more exposed to stress than in normal working circumstances”. In contrast to female employees, on average, male employees with all items partially agree. The results of the Mann–Whitney U test showed that there are statistically significant differences in the perceived reduction in work efficiency among employees by gender, except in the item “due to the inability to cooperate with each other due to the COVID-19 epidemic, my willingness to work decreased”.

In the second step, we used EFA to obtain new variables/factors used in the next step for data analysis using a t-test for two independent samples. Table 4 shows the results of EFA.

Table 4. The results of exploratory factor analysis of work satisfaction, work engagement, and work efficiency.

Statement	Factor Label	Cronbach's Alpha	Commonalities	Factor Loadings
I am satisfied with the working hours and distribution of work obligations during the COVID-19.	Work satisfaction	0.816	0.550	0.741
I am satisfied with the possibilities of training or education during the COVID-19.			0.683	0.826
I am satisfied with flexible working hours during the COVID-19.			0.540	0.735
I am satisfied with the balance between my work and private life during the COVID-19.			0.591	0.769
I am satisfied with the level of self-regulation of work speed that is enabled during the COVID-19.			0.476	0.690
I am satisfied with enabling the flexible workspace (working from home) during the COVID-19.			0.604	0.776
I am satisfied with the leadership during the COVID-19.			0.700	0.836
KMO = 0.827; Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: Approx. Chi-Square = 1903.736, df = 21, $p < 0.01$ Cumulative percentage of explained variance: 64.1%				

Table 4. Cont.

Statement	Factor Label	Cronbach's Alpha	Commonalities	Factor Loadings
I do my work with passion during the COVID-19.	Work engagement	0.838	0.580	0.761
I am engaged in the quality of my work during the COVID-19.			0.663	0.814
I am engaged in achieving successful business results during the COVID-19.			0.529	0.727
I feel the connection with the company in which I worked.			0.625	0.791
I am aware of the importance of innovation for our company, and I am helping to develop the company during the COVID-19.			0.659	0.812
I trust in my colleagues and the manager.			0.586	0.766
I feel that my work and job are important.			0.711	0.843
KMO = 0.846; Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: Approx. Chi-Square = 2206.857, df = 21, $p < 0.01$ Cumulative percentage of explained variance: 63.7%				
Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I am more exposed to stress than in normal working circumstances.	Work efficiency	0.854	0.745	0.863
Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I am more exposed to depressed feelings than in normal working circumstances			0.479	0.691
Due to the COVID-19 epidemic, I do less work than in normal working circumstances.			0.737	0.859
Due to changes in working conditions during the COVID-19, my motivation to work declined.			0.753	0.867
Due to changes in working conditions during the COVID-19, my work satisfaction declined.			0.546	0.738
Due to changes in working conditions during the COVID-19, my work engagement declined.			0.587	0.766
Due to the inability to cooperate with each other due to the COVID-19 epidemic, my willingness to work decreased.			0.653	0.810
Due to changes in working conditions during the COVID-19, it is difficult for me to concentrate at work than in normal working circumstances.			0.556	0.746
Due to changes in working conditions during the COVID-19, the quality of my work decreased as in normal working circumstances.			0.637	0.798
KMO = 0.869; Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: Approx. Chi-Square = 1759.287, df = 36, $p < 0.01$ Cumulative percentage of explained variance: 65.3%				

The results (Table 4) of Bartlett's test of sphericity and the values of the measure of sampling adequacy for each construct, i.e., work satisfaction, work engagement, and work efficiency, suggest that it is appropriate to apply EPFA. Since the KMO values obtained were over 0.8, this suggests a meritorious result. We eliminated those variables in which the values of commonalities were lower than the value 0.40 (for the construct work satisfaction and the construct work engagement, we eliminated one variable). All factor loadings are higher than 0.60, significant at the 0.001 level, and for each construct, the one-dimensional factor solution was obtained. The total variance explained for all three constructs is as follows: work satisfaction is 64.1%, work engagement is 63.7%, and work efficiency is 65.3%. Considering the coefficient Cronbach's alpha values, which were higher than 0.80, we found that all measurement scales proved high reliability.

Gender differences between two independent samples were tested with the *t*-test for two independent samples. Table 5 shows statistically significant gender differences in work satisfaction, work engagement, and work efficiency (factors) among employees during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 5. The results showed statistically significant gender differences in work satisfaction, work engagement, and work efficiency among employees during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hypotheses	Construct	<i>t</i> -Test for Equality of Means						
		<i>t</i>	df	Sig.(2-tail)	Mean Diff.	Std. Err. Diff.	95% Conf. Interval of the Diff.	
							Lower	Upper
H1	Work satisfaction	−5.014	782	0.000	−0.353	0.070	−0.491	−0.215
H2	Work engagement	−2.756	782	0.006	−0.196	0.071	−0.336	−0.056
H3	Work efficiency	−2.204	782	0.028	−0.157	0.071	−0.297	−0.017

The results in Table 5 show that there are statistically significant differences in work satisfaction, work engagement, and work efficiency among employees by gender who work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the results of the *t*-test for two independent samples ($p < 0.05$), we confirmed hypothesis H1. There are significant differences regarding work satisfaction among employees by gender who work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic in Slovenia. We also confirm hypothesis H2, that there are significant differences regarding work engagement among employees by gender who work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic in Slovenia, and hypothesis H3, that there are significant differences regarding work efficiency among employees by gender who work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic in Slovenia.

5. Discussion

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected most companies' workplaces and productivity. Companies have had to make provision for staff to operate remotely following the implementation of lockdown regulations worldwide because the pandemic has led to restrictions on movement and the temporary closure of workplace premises [52]. COVID-19 forced most employees globally to adjust their work patterns [53]. Employers had to find new ways to ensure productivity from employees working remotely from their homes from a business context. As a result, the flexibility of working from home became a new way of operating for many employees [52].

The results showed statistically significant differences in work satisfaction, work engagement, and work efficiency among employees by gender who work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results also showed that the work satisfaction among female employees during the COVID-19 pandemic is perceived lower than work satisfaction among male employees. The results are in line with findings of the OECD [8], Miller [24], Collins et al. [4], Lyttelton et al. [26], and Feng and Savani [9], where the researchers found that during the COVID-19 pandemic, female employees are less satisfied with work as compared with male employees, because their higher household demands,

care for children, and care for elderly relatives interfere with work. Although women are as likely as men to have flexible jobs and work from home, women more often report that they telecommute to balance work and family and to catch up on work, whereas men report that they work from home because they prefer it [54].

Based on results, we found that, on average, female employees are satisfied with enabling the flexible workspace (for example, working from home), with the leadership in the company, and with all the flexible forms of work that the company allows during the COVID-19 pandemic. On the other hand, they are not satisfied with the balance between their work and private life, with the possibilities of training or education during the COVID-19 pandemic, with the working hours and distribution of work obligations during the COVID-19 pandemic, with flexible working hours, and with the level of self-regulation of work speed that is enabled. In contrast to women, work satisfaction among male employees during the COVID-19 pandemic is more strongly expressed. Still, they are also not satisfied with the possibilities of training or education during the COVID-19 pandemic. During this period, some business training or education programs are limited or not implemented. According to Kshirsagar et al., of early March, roughly one-half of training or education programs through June 30, 2020, have been postponed or canceled in North America; in parts of Asia and Europe, the figure is closer to 100 percent [55].

Furthermore, the results showed that the work engagement among female employees during the COVID-19 pandemic is lower than work engagement among male employees. The results are in line with the findings of Miller [24], Collins et al. [4], and Carli [3], in which the researchers found that during the COVID-19 pandemic, female employees are less work engaged as compared with male employees. Despinur et al. analyzed employee engagement on 417 employees in Indonesia [32]. Authors found that at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, the level of engagement of employees with female working engagement had an average score of 3.17, which was lower than the level employees who were male because they have a score of 3.22. Although the overall value of engagement is high, it is known that both male and female employees have lower engagement. Based on the results, we found that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, female employees feel that their work and job are important, they feel the connection with the company in which they worked, they trust in colleagues and the manager, they are engaged with the quality of their work during the pandemic, and they are engaged to achieve successful business results. On the other hand, they had the lowest agreement with doing work with passion during the COVID-19 pandemic and with awareness of the importance of innovation for the company and helping to develop the company during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition, in contrast to female employees, the results showed that male employees are more work engaged. They are more engaged in the quality of their work to achieve successful business results and work with passion during the COVID-19 pandemic. They are also more engaged with feeling that their work and job are important. They are more aware of the importance of innovation for their company, and they are helping to develop the company during the COVID-19 pandemic. They also more than female employees feel the connection with the company in which they work. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the childcare, housekeeping, and other domestic responsibilities of both genders. Still, more than men, women have taken on the responsibility of homeschooling their children and other domestic responsibilities, which consequently reduce work engagement and work satisfaction, as the above results show.

Additionally, the results also indicate that the perceived reduction in work efficiency among female employees during the COVID-19 pandemic is higher expressed than among male employees. The results are in line with the findings of Aderonke et al. [42] and Feng and Savani [9], in which the researchers found that during the COVID-19 pandemic, female employees are in more emotional distress. However, this results in a reduction in female work efficiency. Our results for female employees as compared with male employees show that due to changes in working conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic, the quality of their work decreased compared to normal working circumstances. They are

more exposed to stress than in normal working circumstances; they do less work than in normal working circumstances; during the COVID-19 pandemic their work motivation, work satisfaction, and work engagement declined; they are more exposed to depressed feelings than in normal working circumstances; and, due to changes in working conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is more difficult to concentrate at work than in normal working circumstances. In contrast to women, on average, male employees with all items partially agree.

According to Despinur et al., the COVID-19 pandemic has sparked debate regarding the importance of reconsidering employee work satisfaction and work engagement, such as whether or not companies need to redesign their employee support programs to keep employees fully focused maintaining satisfaction [32] and engagement levels [56]. Since this affects increasing motivation and ultimately increasing work efficiency [32], research results have shown that most employees will feel satisfied even though they work at home. Still, working conditions for both genders must be appropriate [57]. Therefore, we recommend that there is a dire need for managers or employers to not only focus on business results but also on the work satisfaction, work engagement, and work efficiency of their employees. Employers need to continuously check on their workers' performance and work efficiency during this challenging period of the COVID-19 pandemic. Employers should also consider that work satisfaction, work engagement, and work efficiency differ among employees by gender, as we found through our research. Managers or employers should consider the differential effects of this work mode on male and female employees. Given the gender gap in work efficiency, work satisfaction, and work engagement during working from home, companies should provide more support (e.g., flexible work assignments, flexible deadlines, and social support) to female employees to help relieve the pressure brought about by the telecommuting work mode. Companies should regularly examine employees' work satisfaction or work engagement and offer solutions that support a healthy work-life balance, which leads to higher work efficiency, especially in female employees. Moreover, employers should adjust expectations of what productivity looks like during this time.

Companies should cancel or defer performance reviews and recognize that it is impossible to evaluate performance against goals during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many employees currently need to raise and educate their children without institutional support (women more often do this than men), reducing remunerated working hours and increasing stress. From this point of view, employers should be more understanding to employees, especially female employees regarding the composition of work tasks and work schedules. Based on the results, we also found that both female and male employees are partially satisfied with the possibilities of training or education during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, companies should focus on the learning and development of their employees. Employers could introduce webinars and live sessions for new-skill training needed by employees to improve their work. This helps employees to stay safe and healthy at home and at the same time increases their work satisfaction. In addition, to increase work satisfaction, work engagement, and work efficiency, employers also should introduce structured programs like constant communication with employees through video messages from the company's leadership. They can also create and maintain social networks in virtual communities, create a sense of belonging, arrange counseling services for employees, conduct webinars dealing with anxiety and stress, and share best practices of maintaining health.

Companies need to develop employee engagement and communication plans to keep morale high and help their people stay connected. Communications to employees should be regular and frequent, allow weekly all-employee video conferences or conference calls, and encourage employees to share work-from-home experience and tips on what do they find challenging and how to stay focused and productive. Companies must be aware that satisfied and engaged employees are the key to success in this tough pandemic time. Therefore, when employers institute work-from-home practices, they should consider the differential effects of this work mode on male and female employees. Furthermore, employers should help female employees to relieve the pressure brought about by the

telecommuting work mode. This consequently leads to higher work satisfaction, work engagement, and work efficiency of female employees.

Our study contributes to the gender gap literature. Past research has documented that while there are wide gender gaps in the domains of leadership position and work pay [58], there are little to no gender gaps in work-related outcomes, such as work satisfaction and work efficiency [59–61]. Hakanen et al. in their research found that women reported slightly higher work engagement than men [62]. However, these findings were obtained under normal circumstances. We found that in times of crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, work-from-home orders and lack of childcare services create a gender gap in work efficiency, work satisfaction, and work engagement.

Our research faces several limitations that represent possibilities for future research. The present research is limited to work satisfaction, work engagement, and work efficiency. The future research could analyze gender differences in other constructs as well, for example work motivation, employee well-being, occupational stress, or work burnout among employees.

In addition, our research is limited to time periods during the COVID-19 pandemic. Future research could analyze and compare gender difference before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, in our research the influence of occupations is not analyzed. The further research could bring important insights by analyzing the gender differences for employees at the same occupational work positions. For example, Zou [63] found that women, either in full-time or part-time employment, report significantly higher levels of work satisfaction than men at the same work position. The future research may contribute to the understanding of gender differences of employees at the same work position also regarding work engagement and work efficiency, and especially in the COVID-19 changed working environment. Additionally, the future research may reveal that differences across industries could be significant.

Finally, our research is limited to an individual country, Slovenia. A cross-country survey in future research could also offer an assessment of the regulatory environment and the effectiveness of economic policy measures in a pandemic situation.

From a methodological point of view, we see the possibility of further research using structural equation modeling, which would also enable the verification of the dependencies between constructs and the various causal links between them.

6. Conclusions

Our research is the first survey in Slovenia that examines gender differences regarding employees' work satisfaction, work engagement, and work efficiency when working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic increased women's housework and childcare, thereby creating a gender gap in work satisfaction, work engagement, and work efficiency. Given that the COVID-19 pandemic is unlikely to be resolved shortly, the gender gaps we identified are likely to persist. Even after the pandemic, if companies adopt widespread work-from-home policies, such gender gaps might continue to persist. More broadly, decades-long trends toward gender equality in the workplace might be reversed due to these changes. Our research suggests that management researchers and practitioners need to pay careful attention to this issue. Thus, our research show that there are statistically significant differences in work satisfaction, work engagement, and work efficiency among employees by gender during the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, our research highlights which variables related to work satisfaction, work engagement, and work efficiency are more strongly or less expressed between employees by gender during the COVID-19 pandemic. The uncertainty brought on by COVID-19 requires companies to recognize new ways of leadership and explore new ways of working for business continuity. According to Nahavandi, in the long term, with the advent of industry 5.0, these new digital ways of working (for example, telecommuting, virtual gatherings, on-demand education, agile IT and IT risks, cybersecurity, etc.) that rely heavily on technology and virtual environment enablement will continue to be a part of the new normal [64].

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