



The Effect of Flexible Working On Job Performance During the Covid 19 Pandemic: The Mediation Role of Job Characteristics

Covid-19 Pandemi Döneminde Esnek Çalışmanın İş Performansına Etkisi: İş Özelliklerinin Aracılık Rolü

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research is to reveal the impact of flexible working arrangements on the job performance of employees in public institutions and regarding to this impact to try to explain the mediating role of job characteristics modeling. In this cross-sectional study, a quantitative research method was used and it was carried out in 2021 with the participation of employees working in municipalities. Analyses were performed on 312 solid data. The questionnaire technique was used as a data collection tool and Flexible Working Scale, Job Characteristics Scale and Job Performance Scale were used. In analyzing data; skewness and kurtosis, normality, reliability, exploratory factor analysis, descriptive statistical analysis and mediation analysis were applied. Mediation analysis were performed with PROCESS Macro, and other analysis with Jamovi 2.3.18. According to the findings of this research, it was seen that there is a positive impact between flexible working and job characteristics and a negative impact on job performance. As a result, the main hypothesis that job characteristics play a mediating role in the relationship between flexible working and job performance was supported. This result is original and instructive for administrators since it is the first time that such a study has been conducted in the public sector.

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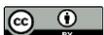
ÖZ

Bu araştırmanın amacı, esnek çalışma düzenlemelerinin kamu kurumlarında çalışanların iş performansı üzerindeki etkisini ortaya koymak ve bu etkide iş özellikleri modellemesinin aracı rolünü açıklamaya çalışmaktır. Kesitsel nitelikteki bu çalışmada nicel araştırma yöntemi kullanılmış ve 2021 yılında belediyelerde görev yapan çalışanların katılımı ile gerçekleştirilmiştir. 312 çalışan üzerinde analizler yapılmıştır. Veri toplama aracı olarak anket tekniği kullanılmış ve Esnek Çalışma Ölçeği, İş Özellikleri Ölçeği ve İş Performansı Ölçeği kullanılmıştır. Verilerin incelenmesinde; çarpıklık ve basıklık, normallik, güvenilirlik, açımlayıcı faktör analizi, betimsel istatistiksel analizler ve aracılık analizleri uygulanmıştır. Arabuluculuk analizleri PROCESS Macro ile, diğer analizler Jamovi 2.3.18 ile yapılmıştır. Araştırmada elde edilen bulgulara göre, esnek çalışma ile iş özellikleri arasında olumlu, iş performansı ile arasında ise olumsuz bir ilişki görülmüştür. Sonuç olarak, esnek çalışma ile iş performansı arasındaki ilişkide iş özelliklerinin aracı rol oynadığı ana hipotezi desteklenmiştir. Bu sonuç, kamuda ilk kez böyle bir çalışma yapıldığından yöneticiler için özgün ve yol göstericidir

1. Introduction

Although the idea of obtaining the highest performance from the employees in order to increase efficiency is not a new approach, it was formed by the need to gain an advantage in the globalizing economy and increasingly competitive environment. This situation has led organizations

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to preferability to increase production and employee performance, and to practices that will enable them to be one step ahead of their competitors (Satırlı, 2019: 1). In this direction, we can say that flexible working and job characteristics have come to an important point in human resources practices.

Today, a qualified workforce appears as a scarce resource. The flexible working model applied by the organization, unlike the classical working model, is regulated according to the needs and expectations of the employee and the employer by making use of legal regulations. In addition to increasing current performance, this makes the organization an attractive place where a qualified workforce can work (Avcı and Yavuz, 2020:40). In this way, it is ensured that the in-house trained workforce remains in the institution, thus contributing to the reduction of the workforce turnover rate and cost advantage. At the same time, by making the institution a preferable place among the qualified workforce outside the organization, it can put it ahead of other organizations in a sustainable competitive environment.

It has been suggested that flexible working is a beneficial tool in improving the work performance of employees in their business lives (Kaçık and Aykan, 2021:40). Job characteristics are the nature and content of the task defined as a job. Job characteristics are related to providing information about the internal motivation of the employees, finding their job meaningful, being responsible for the outputs of the job, and how well they do the job by being informed about the results of the job (Akyüz and Kılıç, 2021:324).

Job performance is defined as an aggregate of employee behaviours that have some expected value to organizations (positive or negative) (Kempf-Leonard, 2004). Job performance consists of two dimensions: task performance and contextual performance. Task performance is the employee's fulfilment of the responsibilities included in the job description. Contextual performance, on the other hand, refers to behaviours that are not directly related to one's job, but voluntarily support the success of others for the effectiveness of the organization (Goodman and Svyantek, 1999; Barutçugil, 2002: 47). In the literature, there are many studies in which job performance is the dependent variable in order to explain the reasons by revealing the performance of the employees (Duan, Deng, and Wibowo, 2023; Qu and Yan, 2023; Aung, Santoso, and Dodanwala, 2023).

Flexible working has different views such as remote working, flexible working hours, and flexible working days (Robbins and Judge, 2019: 248). Flexible working practices date back to the mid-1970s. The effect of flexible working on job performance has attracted the attention of many researchers (Menezes and Kelliher, 2011; Lewis, 2003; Ajayi, Olaniyi, and Abubakar, 2022). In all of the above-mentioned studies, significant relationships were found between flexible working and job performance.

Although flexible working has been on the agenda since the 1970s, it became widespread in the whole business world and deeply affected working life, thanks to the Covid-19 pandemic process. Numerous studies have also been conducted on how the Covid-19 pandemic process affects job performance (Çiftçi and Cindioğlu, 2022; Qu and Yan, 2023; Davidescu, Apostu, Paul, and Casuneanu, 2020). In all of the mentioned studies, it was determined that there is a significant relationship between flexible working and job performance.

Although it is statistically sufficient to determine the relationship between two variables with linear regression analysis, sometimes the result can lead to misleading interpretations. The reason for this is the possibility that a third variable mediates the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. For this reason, mediating variables have been used in many studies to explain the effect of flexible human resources on job performance. To explain the relationship between flexible working and job performance, Sekhar and Patwardhan (2023) employed the role of

supervisor support as a mediating variable, Rahman and Surjant (2020) employed innovative work behaviour, and Yaghi (2016) employed the role of employee empowerment.

The model developed by Hackman and Oldham's (1975) proposes five specific job characteristics which can satisfy employees' intrinsic needs and promote motivation performance. Many studies have shown that job characteristics significantly affect job performance (Johari and Yahya, 2016; Kaya and Elmalı, 2021). Job characteristics have been used as a mediating variable in many studies (Kim, Knight, and Crutsinger, 2009; Holman, Axtell, Sprigg, Totterdell, and Wall, 2010; Judge, Bono, and Locke, 2000). In the literature, there is no study examining the mediating role of job characteristics in the effect of flexible working on job performance. In order to contribute to this gap in the literature, the main hypothesis of the research was determined as the mediating role of job characteristics in the effect of flexible working on job performance.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, which is an epidemic that swept the world, the public, like the private sector, switched to a flexible working system. When the literature was examined, no study was found in the public sector in this area. For this reason, public institutions were chosen as the universe of the study.

In the first part of the study, the concept of flexible working is given, in the second part, job characteristics, in the third part, job performance and in the fourth part, the findings obtained as a result of the research are included.

2. Flexible Working

The concept of flexible working, which emerged in the 1980s, is a working practice that reduces the problems of employees being late for work, provides the employer with the opportunity to work overtime without paying overtime, enables the employer to work at the hours determined by the employer and the employee, and to arrange the working lives of the employees according to their living conditions (Kaçık and Aykan, 2022: 42).

Avcı and Yavuz (2020: 40) argue that flexible working is based on the needs of the employer and the employee by using legal instruments such as collective bargaining agreements and service contracts, and the details of working conditions, where and when the work will be done, instead of the employee's starting and ending times at the workplace being determined by law. Defined as an application in which it can be determined. Flexible working models are preferred applications for increasing efficiency in the institution, reducing interruptions in work, and improving the performance of employees. The flexible working model is an application preferred by the employer as well as the employee.

Flexible working can be defined as a form of arrangement that permanently or temporarily changes the working hours of 8 am to 5 pm or the place of work, which is called classical work. Flexible working models that focus on working hours and working places; can be grouped under two headings in terms of working hours and forms of employment (Turan, 2017: 60-61).

Flexible working models in terms of working hours; shifted work hours, part-time work, on-call work, shift work, job sharing, concentrated work week, compensatory work, and smooth transition to retirement.

Flexitime: Flexitime is applied in two different ways including simple flexitime and qualified flexitime. In the simple flexitime, the employee can set his starting, resting and finishing times. On the other hand, in qualified work hours, the employee can partially determine how long he will work in a day, provided that he does not exceed the average working time required to work daily (Yaşar Tutar, 2016: 31).

Part-time work: Part-time work is the oldest known flexible working model. According to Labor Law 4857, it is up to two-thirds of full-time work. This form of work is based on mutual consent

and agreement between the employee and the employer. Part-time work should be less than normal working hours, production should be continuous and it should be done voluntarily (Aksu, 2022: 35).

On call work: It is a flexible working model that is realized by the employer calling for duty by mutual agreement if the employee needs the field of expertise. The work schedule is made with a written contract between the employer and the employee. (Kördeve, 2016: 38). There are many positive and negative aspects of working on call. This business relationship enables the employer to obtain high efficiency and benefit by employing the employee during busy periods. In this case, while eliminating the concept of passive unemployment, it also alleviates the financial burden. To evaluate the situation in terms of the employee; since it will be possible for the employee to be called at all times, there will be no breaks, week holidays, annual paid leaves, and holidays for the workers (Çelenk, 2008: 52-53).

Shift swapping: It is a working system that is applied in two ways, day and night, in areas such as the industry and service sectors, where production and service have to continue 24 hours without interruption. The start and end time of work varies according to the structure of the business and its field of activity. It is examined in two different ways including fixed and alternating (Tuncer, 2012: 57-58).

Job sharing: It is a part-time job that will last all day, by at least two people with the same job skills. The important thing here is that the duration of the work is determined by the employee, the people who share the work can transfer the work to each other, and finally, team spirit is established among them (Ergün, 2019: 36).

Compressed workweek: A compressed workweek, also known as a compressed work week, means that the weekly working time is 45 hours and the working time can be arranged in different ways, provided that the daily working time cannot exceed 11 hours. This situation has advantages as well as disadvantages for businesses and working individuals. This model allows the employer to increase production during periods of increased workload, without paying the employee such as night wages, overtime, and shift wages. At the same time, the reduction in the labor force, transportation, absenteeism, and being late for work are among the advantageous aspects of this model. This will allow the employee to devote more time to his family and social life, thus increasing his performance. However, due to the prolongation of the daily working time, the employee's work safety is endangered, and productivity decreases. Difficulties such as a decrease in individual performance, an increase in lateness and absenteeism, and a decrease in production rate are among the disadvantages of this model (Tuncer, 2012: 56-57).

Compensatory work: According to Article 64 of the Law; "In cases where work is interrupted due to compelling reasons, the workplace is suspended before or after national holidays and general holidays, or in cases where the workplace is worked significantly below the normal working hours or is completely vacationed, or if the employee is given leave upon request, the employer compensates for the periods not worked within two months. Can do the work." This work will not be more than three hours a day, provided that it does not exceed the maximum daily working time; Taşoğlu and Limoncuoğlu (2010: 81), who mentioned that it is written in the law that make-up work cannot be done on holidays and that overtime work or overtime work wages will not be paid for compensatory work, evaluated this situation as an important numerical flexibility mechanism.

Phased retirements: A soft transition to retirement is the gradual reduction of the employee's working time. It is aimed to reduce the working time, considering that the attention and efficiency of the employee will decrease due to the aging of the employee. Stating that benefiting from the working potential of the workforce in developed countries has recently become widespread,

especially in universities, mentioned that there is no regulation for this practice in Turkey (Turan, 2017: 77).

Flexible working models in terms of employment patterns; can be grouped under 3 headings: working from home, working remotely, and working on loan.

Working from home: It is the way of working at the place determined by the employee himself, by providing the necessary tools, equipment, materials and equipment to finalize the product or service at the employer, within the limits determined by the employer (Kurtipek, 2021: 25-26).

Remote (Tele) operation: This flexible working model, also known as Telework, is a way of working away from the workplace and friends, with the support of information and communication technologies, with the joint decision of the employer and the employee. In order to benefit from the remote working model, this situation must be successfully managed and the necessary technological equipment must be provided for the employee. The day, hour, place, target, and results should be determined in advance between the employer and the employee (Avcı ve Yavuz, 2020: 42).

Borrowing business relationship: It is the temporary transfer of an employer to another employer, provided that he/she is employed within the organization or in a different department belonging to the same corporate group, or in jobs similar to his/her existing duty, by obtaining the written approval of the employee, without severing his/her ties with the employee who is bound by an employment contract. A loan business relationship, also known as a temporary business relationship, may occur for different reasons. An enterprise in an economic crisis may lend to a different enterprise, provided that it does not exceed six months, instead of dismissing its employee. On the other hand, in order to adopt a technological system or hardware, it can benefit from an employee of another enterprise (Taner ve AvşarNegiz, 2018: 564).

3. Job Characteristics

Today, businesses need to consider many factors in order to achieve their goals. One of the resources they need in order to achieve their goals, is their job performance. Low work performance means low production, low efficiency. Different business models need to be created to increase efficiency and performance. The job characteristics of the works should be determined and redesigned according to today's conditions. Job enrichment is at the core of the job characteristics model. A well-designed job is expected to have five key job characteristics: skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback (Akyüz and Kılıç, 2021: 324).

Job characteristics that aim to bring the job and the employee together and establish a bond between them, by making the right job design, make the individual feel valuable while doing business, and increase his performance and productivity in the workplace. Job characteristics can be grouped under five sub-dimensions: skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback (Katircioğlu, 2022: 36).

Skill variety: Skill variety is related to the extent to which the employee uses his existing skills and abilities during the work process. The main purpose here is to save the employee, who has more than one skill and competence, from the feeling of monotony and boredom by designing a new business model, to motivate and increase his performance (Kenek, 2021: 47).

Task identity: Task identity is expressed as the execution of a job by an employee from beginning to end (Uysal, 2014: 62). Skill diversity is the assignment of tasks according to the skill and ability of the employee. When a task with a wide variety of jobs will be assigned, high skill and talent will be sought in the employee. Variety of skills; with the importance of the task and the identity of the task, it contributes to the employees making their work meaningful and increasing their performance (Akin, 2019: 3).

Task significance: The significance of the task is to indicate the importance of the job relative to other people (Akin, 2019: 3). The fact that the work done by the individual has a significant impact inside or outside the organization affects the fact that it is seen as important and meaningful by the employee. Having a high degree of importance for the job will increase his ownership and satisfaction with his job (Kenek, 2021: 47).

Autonomy: While Akin (2019:3) defines job autonomy as the freedom to make decisions that can be applied at work, according to Katircioğlu (2022: 53), employee engagement is one of the important job characteristics that affect job satisfaction and motivation. Job autonomy allows the employee to use skills such as individual job design and job programming (Akin, 2019: 3).

Feedback: In terms of feedback, While Akin (2019: 3) talks about feedback as the employee's responsibility to learn about the success or failure of the job, not by hearing from the outside, but by observing and experiencing it, Sert (2017: 55) defined it as getting information about the success or failure of the employee's performance while doing his job.

4. Job Performance

Performance is a person's effort to overcome any task, and an effort to effectively complete his or her part in order to achieve success. High employee performance will positively affect the achievement of the strategic goals of the business or institution, and if the employee performance is lower than the expectation of the business, there may be situations that may adversely affect the business.

The concept of performance appraisal can be defined in different ways. Atasayar Tanrıyisever (2018: 5) evaluates performance; it is defined as the process that enables the systematic analysis of the employee's strengths and weaknesses regarding the work, the orientation of the employee in terms of business objectives, and the realization of the responsibilities in the job description, obtaining information about the degree of efficiency and competence, and measuring employee performance.

In order to talk about the concept of performance, there must be a person or group, a task, and a certain time period in the system. The system covers all positions in the organization, from employee to employer, from supervisor to officer. The important thing is to correctly determine which positions will be included in the system and to determine the job description, time, period, field of activity, and target of the work. In this way, it can be emphasized how well the employee can fulfill his pre-drawn work or duties at a certain time (Can, 2010: 4).

Today, all businesses are in an intense competition environment with each other. For this reason, businesses expect their employees from the highest level to the lowest level to display high performance in the hierarchical order. Organizations want to determine in which areas their employees can be successful by using their knowledge, abilities and skills, and who can add value to the institution. Therefore, both public institutions and the private sector need to understand and analyze the concept of performance (Şahin, 2019: 3-4). Job performance behaviours are classified into two groups task performance and contextual performance (Boz, Dursun, ve Meral, 2021: 252). Goodman and Svyentek (1999) contextual performance divides it into altruism and conscientiousness.

While job performance behaviors are defined as the professional technical knowledge, skills and activities of the employee; contextual performance behaviors can also be defined as helping one's colleagues outside of the job description, making extra efforts, and performing the necessary activities for the development of the organization. Contextual performance behaviors are beneficial for cooperation within the organization and also contribute to the increase of the motivation of the employees (Balcioglu, 2019: 51).

Task performance: Institutions evaluate employee performance with the product produced or the service provided. It is the employee's contribution to the organizational performance gained by the institution he works for and acting in accordance with the criteria of the performance expected by the organization. Job performance means the full implementation of the contract between the employer and the employee (Dikbaş, 2019: 23).

Task performance is described in four main dimensions. These can be listed as (a) job proficiency, (b) non-work related proficiency, (c) verbal and written communication proficiency, and (d) supervisory competence for managerial and leadership positions. Each of these four dimensions consists of sub-factors that can change the case of different tasks. Providing feedback as a supervisory factor, motivating, directing and directing subordinates; the ability to coordinate other resources, as well as the employees, in order to realize the goals of the organization as a productivity factor, and to maintain healthy business relations as a relationship factor (Yavuz, 2018: 19).

Job performance is defined as all of the behaviors and activities that the employee has to do and are included in the job description in order to achieve the goals and objectives of the organization. For Faculty members working at universities; scientific research and publications, managing students' projects and seminars, accepting students on certain days, guiding and guiding them can be given as examples of activities that can be evaluated within the scope of task performance. Because these activities take place within the responsibilities of faculty members within the framework of the relevant regulation (Güngör, 2019: 19-20).

Contextual performance: Contextual performance includes behaviours that are not in the job description of the employee but indirectly contribute to organizational performance. The effort he displays voluntarily outside of his job description, helping his teammates voluntarily, and defending his institution when necessary can be given as examples of the contextual performance. In the basis of the contextual performance, the effort of their own will for the success of the organization and the relations of helping each other with the employees is seen (Öztürk, 2019: 8).

According to Güler (2019: 77), who mentioned that contextual performance consists of five factors; Volunteering in order to carry out work activities even though it is not in the job description, performing the activities in their job descriptions in the best way and maintaining it enthusiastically, cooperating by helping other teammates, approving and defending organizational goals and defending them when necessary.

According to Dikbaş (2019: 24), who mentioned that there are some differences between task and contextual performance, task performance is determined by measuring the employee's abilities and the results of his/her job, while contextual performance is determined by measuring the employee's characteristic features and motivation status, so task performance is not a formal one. While it is a task and a role, he mentioned that contextual performance is behaviour and optional outside of formal roles.

Güngör (2019: 20), who gives an example of contextual performance through faculty members, as discussed on the task performance, said that an academician working in this task will organize a trip, etc., that will contribute to the socialization of the students. He mentioned that leading the organization of activities can be considered as contextual performance and that although such an activity is not among the duties and responsibilities of the faculty member, it contributes to the integration of students, broadening their horizons and discovering new places.

Table 1: Differences Between Task and Contextual Performance

Task Performance	Contextual Performance
Task activities contribute directly or indirectly to the technical core of the organization.	Contextual activities support the psychological, social, and organizational environment in which task performance develops.
Task activities differ between different jobs within similar organizations.	Contextual activities are common to all jobs.
The roles of task activities are defined and are behaviors where employee performance is paid for.	The role definition of contextual behaviors is more flexible.
The human characteristics that are important to define task activity are knowledge, ability, and feasibility.	For contextual performance, the main source is employee disposition and volunteerism. Volunteering includes helping, continuance behaviors.

Source: Güngör, A. Y. (2019). The effect of cyberloafing on employee performance: The case of Türkiye-Poland. Kafkas University, Institute of Social Sciences, Master Thesis.

Contextual performance is a behavior that supports the organizational, social, and psychological environment. This includes non-job-specific task ability, extra role performance, organizational citizenship behavior and interpersonal relations (Tiryaki Şen, 2018: 35).

5. Relationship Between Flexible Working, Job Characteristics and Job Performance and Formation of Hypotheses

5.1. The Relationship Between Flexible Working and Job Performance

In the literature, there are many studies examining the relationship between flexible working and job performance. While some of the studies did not find a significant relationship between flexible working and job performance, it was stated in other studies that flexible working positively affects job performance. Kattenbach, Demerouti, and Nachreiner (2010) found no relationship between flexible working in the service sector and job performance in Germany, and in a study conducted in the banking sector in Turkey, it was stated that flexible working negatively affects job performance (Kaçık and Aykan, 2022: 55). In the research conducted by Çitçi and Cindioğlu Demirel (2022), among university employees during the Covid-19 pandemic period, Türk Güven (2022) found a strong positive relationship between flexible working and job performance in his research at the hospital.

On the other hand, it is stated in many studies that flexible working affects job performance positively. In a study conducted in the production sector in Nigeria (Idowu, 2020) and in the service sector in Thailand (Charoensukmongkol and Pandey, 2023), it was stated that flexible working positively affects work performance. It is stated that the flexible arrangement of working hours by companies in Europe is aimed at increasing work performance rather than obscuring the work-family balance (Menezes and Kelliher, 2011).

In the light of this information, the first research hypothesis was formed as follows.

H₁: Flexible working has had a significant relationship with work performance during the COVID-19 pandemic.

a. The Relationship Between Flexible Working and Job Characteristics

The autonomy dimension of the Job characteristics model developed by Hackman and Oldham (1975) is concerned with planning the job and deciding the processes to be implemented, giving the employee freedom, independence, and discretion. In this context, flexible working leaves employees more initiative in how they can use their time. Based on this assumption, it can be said that flexible working provides high job satisfaction and thus increases job performance.

According to the research of Zapf and Weber (2017), it has been determined that the employer's attitude and job characteristics are determinative of the preference for flexible working. In the light of this information, a hypothesis about flexible working arrangements and job

characteristics was produced (Zapf and Weber, 2017). In the light of this information, the second research hypothesis was formed as follows.

H₂: Flexible working has a significant relationship with job characteristics during the COVID-19 pandemic.

b. Relationship Between Job Characteristics and Job Performance

In the research conducted by Dan and Kenikasahmanworakhun (2023), it has been learned that job characteristics such as skill variety, task significance and feedback affect employee performance.

In a study conducted in a company operating in technology development regions in Ankara and in the information and communication technologies sector, the effect of job resourcefulness variable performance variable on contextual performance and task performance was found to be positive and significant (Miser, 2022: 145). In the research conducted on teachers working in primary and secondary schools within the borders of the Republic of Turkey, cognitive resourcefulness, which is the sub-dimension of the job resourcefulness variable, significantly affects employee performance, while the relational resourcefulness dimension does not significantly affect employee performance (Kaynak, 2022: 228). In the light of this information, the third research hypothesis was formed as follows.

H₃: Job characteristics have been significantly associated with job performance during the COVID-19 pandemic.

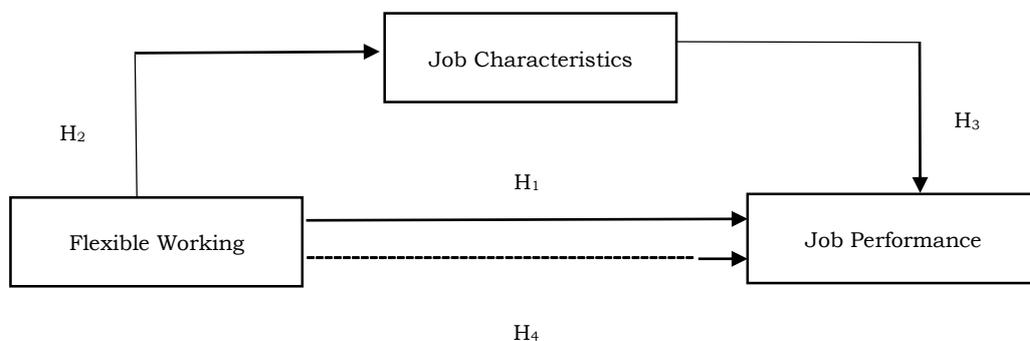
c. Mediation Role Job Characteristics Between Flexible Working and Job Performance

In the literature, there are studies that test the moderator role, not the mediating role of job characteristics in the effect of flexible working on job performance. Neirrotti, Raguseo, and Gastaldi (2019) divide flexible working practices into two purposes: the accommodation of employees' personal lives (employment practice) and the operational reasons of a firm (work practice). As a result of the research, they reached the conclusion that the characteristics of a job that favour work disaggregation positively moderate the influence of flexible work as a work practice on job satisfaction, but they do not moderate the influence of flexible work as an employment practice.

Considering the fact that job characteristics positively affect job satisfaction and job outcomes, it is assumed that job characteristics will have a mediating effect between flexible working and job performance, and the following hypothesis has been developed:

H₄: Job Characteristics Have a Mediating Effect Between Flexible Working and Job Performance

Figure 1: The Conceptual Framework of the Research Model



The model of the research within the framework of the developed hypotheses is shown in Figure 1.

5. Methodology

a. Data Cleaning

Since there are 35 expressions in the research model, it was aimed to collect 10 times as much data. For this purpose, 400 hand-made questionnaires were distributed to the participants. 325 questionnaires were collected back as filled, and 5 of them were excluded from the evaluation due to insufficient data. Outliers of 320 data were examined according to the Mahalanobis distance coefficient, 8 data with a significance value less than 0.05 were removed from the data set, and the analysis continued with 312 data. Ethical approval was obtained from Istanbul Ticaret University with the number E-65836846-044-229417 dated 10.11.2021.

b. Measurement Tools and Measurement Application

In the research, 3 different measurement tools were used to measure flexible working, job characteristics and job performance. Demographic variables are limited to 10 variables. The questionnaire form used in the research consisted of 3 parts. The first part consists of demographic questions (age, gender, marital status, education level, number of children, if any, total work experience, working time at the last workplace, status at the workplace and managerial level). In the second part, the Flexible Working Scale were taken from Galinsky et al. (2008). Turkish expressions of the Flexible Working Scale were taken from Yılmaz Ergun Dinç's (2019:130) master's thesis. In these scales, a five-point Likert-type rating scale was used.

In order to collect data on job characteristics, the study drew upon the job diagnostics survey of Hackman and Oldham (1975), which originally had 15 items. Five items were included in the questionnaire, following the revised scales of Idaszak and Drasgow (1987) and specifically Miller (2015) that customized the scale down to five questions, to measure the job design features, namely autonomy, task identity, task significance, feedback from the job and skill variety. Turkish expressions of the Job characteristic Scale were taken from Yılmaz Ergun Dinç's (2019:130) master's thesis. In these scales, a five-point Likert-type rating scale was used.

The job Performance Scale consists of two dimensions such as contextual performance and task performance. The contextual performance scale was developed by Smith, Organ and Near (1983), task performance scale was developed by Goodman and Svyantek (1999). The measure of contextual performance used here was Smith, Organ, and Near's (1983) organizational citizenship behaviour measure. Contextual performance measure was composed of 16 statements. These items represent two factors which are altruism and conscientiousness. The measure of task performance includes 9 statements in one dimension.

There are 25 items under three sub-dimensions in the scale: altruism (7), conscientiousness (9) and task performance (9). The first two dimensions of 16 items constitute contextual performance (Goodman and Svyantek, 1999). Turkish expressions of the Job Performance Scale were taken from Işın Arslan's (2018:172) master's thesis. Scoring of the scales is as 1-Strongly disagree, 2- Disagree, 3- Undecided, 4- Agree, and 5- Strongly agree.

c. Factor Analysis

In the study, reliability and exploratory factor analysis of data measurement tools were performed with Jamovi 2.3.18. In Table 2, the results of the exploratory factor analysis related to the "Flexible Working Scale" are given.

Table 2: Exploratory Factor Analysis Results for Flexible Working Scale

Items	Factor Load
I can periodically change starting and quitting times at work within some range of hours.	0.766
I can work some regular paid hours at home occasionally.	0.883
I can compress my workweek by working longer hours on fewer days for at least part of the year. (i.e. working 10 hours for four days a week).	0.851
I can work some regular paid hours at home on a regular basis.	0.857
KMO=0.817; Barlett Test: 577.677; p<0.000	
Total Variance Explained	%70.62

Note: 'varimax' rotation was used.

As can be seen in Table 2, the findings regarding the factor distribution and factor analysis of the flexible working scale are presented. The total variance explained was determined as 70.62%. The KMO coefficient shows whether the sample size is suitable for factor analysis. For the sample size to be sufficient, the KMO value should be 0.60 and above; Barlett's test should also be significant (p<0.05) (Tabachnick ve Fidell, 2013).

Table 3: Exploratory Factor Analysis Results for Job Characteristics Scale

Items	Factor Load
I use many different skills or talents as part of my job.	0.552
I know how well I am doing on my job by doing what is required.	0.810
The results of my job affect the lives and well-being of others.	0.740
My job involves doing a "whole" and identifiable piece of work.	0.627
I can determine how and when my work gets done.	0.435
KMO=0.689; Barlett Test: 212.127; p<0.00	
Total Variance Explained	%41.79

Note: 'varimax' rotation was used

As can be seen in Table 3, the findings regarding the factor distribution and factor analysis of the job characteristics scale are presented. The fact that the KMO value is 0.689 according to the table shows that the Barlett sphericity test is significant, that the number of samples is sufficient and that the data are suitable for factor analysis. The total variance explained was determined as 41.79%.

Table 4: Exploratory Factor Analysis Results for the Job Performance Scale

	Items	Factor Load		
		F1	F2	F3
	(Values above 0.30 are given in the table)			
1	Helps other employees with their work when they have been absent. (AL1)	0.411	0.377	0.339
2	Exhibits punctuality arriving at work on time in the morning and after lunch breaks. (CON1)		0.522	
3	Volunteers to do things not formally required by the job. (AL2)			0.742
4	Takes undeserved work breaks. (R_CON2)		0.780	
5	Takes initiative to orient new employees to the department even though not part of his/her job description. (AL3)	0.328	0.422	0.316
6	Exhibits attendance at work beyond the norm, for example, takes fewer days off than most individuals or fewer than allowed. (CON3)			0.602
7	Helps others when their work load increases (assists others until they get over the hurdles). (AL4)	0.409		0.461
8	Coasts toward the end of the day. (CON4)		0.416	0.466
9	Gives advance notice if unable to come to work (CON5)	0.361	0.490	
10	Spends a great deal of time in personal telephone conversations. (R_CON6)		0.446	
11	Does not take unnecessary time off work. (CON7)		0.685	
12	Assists me with my duties. (AL5)	0.458	0.440	0.337
13	Makes innovative suggestions to improve the overall quality of the department. (AL6)	0.391		0.458
14	Does not take extra breaks. (CON8)	0.300	0.747	
15	Willingly attends functions not required by the organization, but helps in its overall image (AL7)			0.726
16	Does not spend a great deal of time in idle conversation. (CON9)		0.532	
17	Achieves the objectives of the job. (TASK1)	0.551		
18	Meets criteria for performance. (TASK2)	0.778		
19	Demonstrates expertise in all job-related tasks. (TASK3)	0.761		
20	Fulfills all the requirements of the job. (TASK4)	0.801		
21	Could manage more responsibility than typically assigned. (TASK5)	0.585		0.441
22	Appears suitable for a higher level role. (TASK6)	0.484		0.331
23	Is competent in all areas of the job, handles tasks with proficiency. (TASK7)	0.678		0.341
24	Performs well in the overall job by carrying out tasks as expected. (TASK8)	0.750		
25	Plans and organizes to achieve objectives of the job and meet deadlines. (TASK9)	0.716	0.386	
	Total variance explained (Task performance= % 34.9, Althurism= %7.92, Conscientiousness= %6.85)			%49.6

Note: 'varimax' rotation was used.

Notes: Task: Task performance, AL: Althurism, CON: Conscientiousness.

The items in the job performance scale were grouped under three factors in the exploratory factor analysis as in the original. The altruism factor can be characterized as citizenship behaviour toward individuals and the conscientiousness is citizenship behaviour in relation to the organization. Goodman and Svyentek (1999) combined the dimensions of altruism and conscientiousness under contextual performance. Expressions 1, 5, 7, 8, 12, and 13 were excluded from the analysis because they were in different dimensions, with a difference of less than 10%. Item number 6, which was under the dimension of conscientiousness in the original scale, was included under the dimension of altruism (see Table 4). In factor adequacy analysis, the KMO value of the scale is 0.91, and the Barlett test is significant. In the reliability analysis of the sub-dimensions; Cronbach's alpha values were 0.88 in the task performance dimension, 0.75 in the conscientiousness dimension, and 0.59 in the altruism dimension. Since the total Cronbach's alpha value of the scale was 0.90, the altruism dimension was not excluded from the analysis. Ultimately, there are 9 items under the task performance dimension, 3 items under the altruism dimension, and 7 items under the conscientiousness dimension. KMO value is 0.91 and the Barlett test is significant. As such, the scale explains 49.6% of the variation in variance.

In many studies, the dimensions of altruism and conscientiousness are evaluated together as relational performance. In this study, the results will be interpreted accordingly.

a. Reliability Analysis

Flexibility scale: When all the expressions of the flexibility scale were included in the analysis, the scale reliability value was found to be 0.404. Cronbach's α increased to 0.860 when expression number four was removed from the scale. According to the literature, the alpha coefficient between $0.80 \leq \alpha < 1.00$ shows that the scale is highly reliable.

Job characteristics scale: When all the expressions of the job characteristics scale were included in the analysis, the reliability of the scale was 0.600 (Yıldız and Uzunsakal, 2018: 19; George and Mallery, 2003: 231).

Job performance scale: When all the expressions of the job performance scale were included in the analysis, Cronbach's alpha value was 0.900. According to the literature, the alpha coefficient between $0.80 \leq \alpha < 1.00$ shows that the scale is highly reliable.

b. Descriptive Statistics

The findings regarding the demographic variables obtained from the research are given in Table 5. The demographic information of the participants examined within the scope of the research is given in Table 5. According to the table, 13 (4.2%) in the 18-24 age group, 132 (42.3%) in the 25-34 age group, 117 (37.5%) in the 34-44 age range, and 50 (%) in the 45 and over age group. 16 person. While 46.5% (145) of the participants were female, 53.5% (167) were male. Considering marital status, 208 (66.7%) participants were married, while 104 (33.3%) participants were single. In terms of education level, 2 (0.6%) doctorate graduates, 38 (12.2%) graduate students, 172 (55.1%) undergraduate students, 45 (14.4% associate degree students and 55 (17.6%) individuals) Individuals are high school graduates or below. 59.6% (186) of the participants have children, while 40.4% (126) have no children. (24) have three children, 24.4% (76) have two children and 25% (78) have one child. 27.2% people have 6-10 years, 112 (359%) people have 11-15 years and 89 (28.5%) people have 11 years or more work experience. While 4.2% were working in this institution for less than 1 year, 98 (31.4%) were between 1-5 years, 112 (35.9%) were between 6-10 years and 89 (28.5) were 11 years. 61 of the participants (19.6%) are working in a managerial position, and 251 (80.4%) of them are not working in a managerial position, top-level managers, 26 (8.3%) middle-level managers and 37 (11.9%) lower-level managers.

Table 5: Distribution of Participants by Demographic Characteristics

	Groups	Frequency (F)	Percent (%)
Age	18-24 age	13	4.2
	25-34 age	132	42.3
	35-44 age	117	37.5
	45 and upper	50	16.0
Gender	Female	145	46.5
	Male	167	53.5
Marital status	Single	104	33.3
	Married	208	66.7
Education	High school and below	55	17.6
	Below high school	45	14.4
	High school	172	55.1
	Graduate	38	12.2
	PhD	2	6.0
Do you have children?	Yes	186	59.6
	No	126	40.4
If yes, how many?	0	126	40.4
	One	78	25.0
	Two	76	24.4
	Three	24	7.7
	four	8	2.6
Your total work experience?	Between 1-5 year	54	17.3
	Between 6-10 year	85	27.2
	Between 11-15 year	81	26.0
	Between 16 year and upper	92	29.5
What is your working time in this workplace?	Below 1 year	13	4.2
	Between 1-5 year	98	31.4
	Between 6-10 year	112	35.9
	11 year and upper	89	28.5
Your status	Manager	61	19.6
	Not manager	251	80.4
If you are manager	Top manager	3	1.0
	Middle manager	26	8.3
	Sub manager	37	11.9

Table 6 contains descriptive statistics on flexible working, job characteristics and job performance scales. The skewness coefficient of the scores of the employees from the flexible working scale is 0.507, and the skewness coefficient of the scores they got from the job characteristics scale is -0.177. When examined in terms of sub-dimensions, the skewness coefficients for the sub-dimensions of task performance, altruism and conscientiousness are 0.434, -0.938 and -0.175, respectively. When examined in terms of scales and sub-dimensions, it can be said that it has a normal distribution since the skewness values are between -1.5 and +1.5 (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2013).

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics Obtained from Research Data

Variables	n	Min.	Max.	Ort.	SD	Skewness
Flexibility	312	1.00	5	2.36	1.12	0.507
Job characteristics	312	1.40	5	3.64	0.63	-0.177
Task performance	312	2.22	5	4.25	0.49	-0.434
Altruism	312	1.57	5	4.31	0.49	-0.938
Conscientiousness	312	2.67	5	4.19	0.54	-0.175

Notes: n= Sample size, SD. Standard deviation.

c. Correlation Analysis

The correlation values of the variables in the research model are shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Correlation Analysis of Dimensions

	Variable	1	2	3	4
1	Flexibility				
2	Job characteristics	0.259**			
3	Task performance	0.091	0.416**		
4	Altruism	-0.119*	0.174**	0.477**	
5	Conscientiousness	0.600	0.343**	0.560**	0.589**

Notes: **The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level. *The correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.

When the values in Table 7 are examined, it is seen that the flexibility variable has a positive correlation with job characteristics and a negative correlation with the dimension of being at work; it is seen that job characteristics have a significant correlation with the three dimensions of job performance.

5. Findings Regarding the Hypotheses

Mediator variable analysis is used to more clearly explain the causal relationship between an independent variable and a dependent variable with the help of a third variable (intermediary) that is also affected by that independent variable and also affects the dependent (İslamoğlu ve Alnıaçık, 2019: 423).

There are two approaches to the interpretation of mediation analyses. Baron and Kenny (1986) state that four conditions must be met for mediation analysis to be performed: (1) the independent variable (X) must have a significant effect on the dependent variable (Y) (path c). (2) The independent variable must have a significant effect on the mediating variable (a). (3) When controlling for the effect of the independent variable (M), it must be proven that the mediating variable has a significant effect on the dependent variable (b). (4) When the mediating variable is included in the model, it should be shown that the initially existing direct relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable changes significantly at the level (c) (partial mediating effect) or completely disappears (full mediating effect) (c'). Also, for mediation analysis, the indirect effect must be significant, and the Sobel test shows that the value of the indirect effect is greater than zero ($z > 1.96$) (Gürbüz and Bayık, 2021).

Hayes (2022), unlike Baron and Kenny, sees it as a much more important issue, especially whether the indirect effect (a.b) is significant. The new approach does not look for conditions related to the successive steps of the Baron and Kenny method, and argues that even if these conditions are not met, there may be a mediating effect (indirect effect; a.b) (Gürbüz and Bayık, 2021);

In this study, Hayes' method was used in mediation analysis.

The mediating role of job characteristics in the effect of flexibility on job performance. According to the analysis results given in Table 8, it shows that the overall effect between flexibility and job performance is insignificant ($\beta = 0.01, p > 0.05, R^2 = 0.16$). Path a from flexibility to job characteristics ($\beta = 0.14, p < 0.001, R^2 = 0.07$) and path b from job properties to job performance ($\beta = 0.27, p < 0.001, R^2 = 0.16$) are both significant. Finally, job characteristics are significant when included in the relationship between flexibility and job performance ($\beta = 0.03, p > 0.05$). In the effect analyses made with the bootstrap technique, the confidence interval (CI) values obtained as a result of the analysis should not contain the value of zero (0) in order to support the research hypotheses. The indirect effect ($\beta = 0.04, CI\ 95\% = 0.02, 0.06$) calculated with 5000 reloads, does not include a CI value of zero. According to this result, job characteristics have a mediating effect on the effect of flexibility on task performance. H₂, H₃ and H₄ hypotheses were supported.

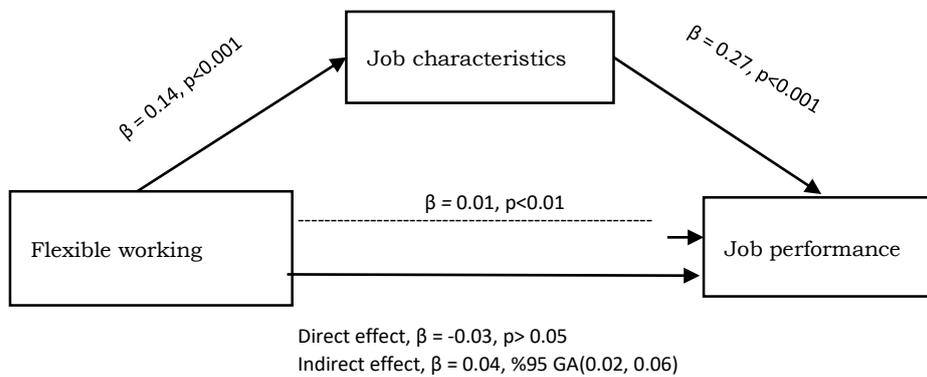
Table 8: Mediation Role of Job Characteristics in the Effect of Flexibility on Job Performance Dimension (N= 312)

Predictive Variables	Output Variables				CI
	Job Characteristics		Job performance		
	β	SE	β	SE	
Flexible working (path c)	-	-	0.01	0.02	-0.04, 0.05
R ²	-	-	0.16		
Flexible working (path a)	0.14***	0.03	-	-	0.08, 0.20
R ²	0.07		-	-	
Flexible working (path c')	-	-	0.03	0.02	-0.07, 0.00
Job Characteristics (path b)	-	-	0.27***	0.04	0.20, 0.34
R ²	-	-	0.16		
Indirect effect	-	-	0.04, (0.02, 0.06)		

Notes: *p < 0.05, **p > 0.01, ***p < 0.001. β = Non-standardized beta coefficients; SE = Standard Error; Values in parentheses are lower and upper confidence intervals. Bootstrap resampling = 5000.

The mediating role of job characteristics in the relationship between flexible working and job performance is reported in Table 8. Looking at the sub-dimensions of job performance, it is seen that job characteristics have a mediating role for all three dimensions of job performance. Altruism dimension: $\beta = 0.09$, CI%95 = (0.05, 0.14), conscientiousness dimension $\beta = 0.06$, CI%95 = (0.01, 0.05). Task performance dimension: $\beta = 0.09$, CI%95 = (0.02, 0.07).

Figure 2: The Mediating Role of Job Characteristics in the Effect of Flexibility on Job Performance Dimension



Notes: Non-standardized beta coefficients have been reported. R_2 : Explained variance, CI: Confidence interval.

5. Conclusion

In this study, the mediating role of flexible working arrangements and job characteristics on the job performance of employees and the mediating role of job characteristics in the effect of flexible working on job performance during the Covid-19 pandemic were investigated. The study is limited to the employees working in the public sector and the measurement tools used within the scope of the research. Within the scope of the analysis, it has been determined that job performance, which is the dependent variable, has three sub-dimensions: task performance, conscientiousness and altruism. When the relationship between the variables was examined, a positive relationship was found between flexible working and job characteristics, and a negative relationship with the sub-dimension of job performance, the dimension of complying with organizational rules; it has been seen that job characteristics have a significant relationship with all three sub-dimensions of job performance in the province.

The H_1 hypothesis, which was established as There was a significant relationship between flexible working practices and work performance during the Covid-19 pandemic process, was not supported. This result can be interpreted as flexible working practices do not have a significant effect on the work performance of the workers. This result is not in line with research results proving the effect of flexible working on job performance (Çiftçi, 2022; Qu and Yan, 2023; Davidescu, Apostu, Paul, and Casuneanu, 2020).

The lack of a significant relationship between flexible working and job performance can be thought to be due to the fact that the research was conducted in the public sector. Ballantine, Wall, and Ward (2022), in their research conducted in the UK public sector using the interview method, determined that the flexible working discourse and practice were not consistent. Participants attribute this to the difficulty of reaching senior managers in flexible working. It is difficult to comment, since there was no such question in our study. In a study conducted by public employees in Isparta, some institution employees found flexible working appropriate, while some public employees (province and health) reported that they did not find it right (Taner, 2018).

H_2 hypothesis that flexible working had a significant relationship with job characteristics during the Covid-19 pandemic was supported. The autonomy dimension of the job characteristics

model expresses the level of decision-making of employees about their own jobs (Hackman and Oldham, 1975). Assuming that flexible working increases employee autonomy, this result is consistent with the theory.

The H₃ hypothesis, which established that job characteristics had a significant relationship with job performance during the Covid-19 pandemic process, was supported. This result is consistent with the findings of Johari and Yahya (2016) and Kaya and Elmalı (2021).

The H₄ hypothesis, which was established as job characteristics have a mediating effect between task performance and flexible working, was supported. This result about the main hypothesis of the research is an original contribution to the literature.

When the findings are evaluated in general, organizations should pay particular attention to skill variety, task importance, task identity, autonomy and feedback in flexible working arrangements. Job characteristics have a significant impact on the internal constructive and positive behaviours expected of employees. In addition, job characteristics are also an important determinant in the task performance and contextual performance of the employees.

Limitations of your research. This research was carried out in Istanbul under pandemic conditions. It was not possible to reach a large sample group because a limited number of public employees came to work due to the pandemic. The second limitation is that the research data were collected only from people working in municipalities.

Suggestions for researchers. This research can be repeated with a larger sample group using the same model. The sample group can be expanded by including public employees working outside the municipalities. Second suggestion; the inclusion of public and private sector employees in the research together. In the case of data collection from two sections, it will be possible to compare the attitudes of public and private sector employees. Flexible working has become widespread in the conditions of our country during the pandemic. The use of quantitative and qualitative methods together in new research will make it easier to interpret the results of the research.

Recommendations for practitioners. As a result of the research, no significant relationship was found between flexible working in the public sector and job performance; On the other hand, the assumption that job characteristics mediate between flexible working and job performance has been confirmed. It seems that the flexible working method will become widespread in the public sector in the following periods as well. Considering this reality, it is thought that it would be beneficial for public administrators to reconsider their job characteristics in flexible working conditions in a way that motivates employees.

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