ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Flexible Working from the Perspective of Media Sector Managers[*]

Medya Sektörü Yöneticilerinin Perspektifinden Esnek Çalışma

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Abstract

One of the most significant alternative work arrangements that emerged during the pandemic has been flexible working. During this period, many sectors were compelled to rapidly adapt to this new work model. The main purpose of the research is to understand and explain the concept of flexible working (FW), which has emerged due to the rapid development of today's technologies and the changes in business life and social environment, through the media sector. The qualitative method was preferred, and phenomenology was chosen as the research design. The media sector was preferred as a sector where flexible working is common, and the data was obtained from semi-structured interviews with middle and senior managers of companies in the sector. 64 codes obtained from the data were collected under 6 themes that provide semantic integrity. As a result of the research, it was observed that the participants were introduced to the concept of flexible working during the Covid-19 period and had the opportunity to experience their models during the pandemic period. Contrary to the literature, it was determined that the participants had much less knowledge and experience about flexible working models. A form of flexibility has often been found to be defined in terms of current needs rather than just training.

Keywords: Flexible Working, Pandemic, Covid-19, Media Sector, Phenomenology.

Öz

Pandemi sürecinin ortaya çıkardığı en önemli alternatif iş yapma biçimlerinden biri esnek çalışma olmuştur. Bu dönemde, pek çok sektör hızla bu yeni iş modelini deneyimlemek zorunda kalmıştır. Araştırmanın temel amacı; günümüz teknolojilerinin hızla gelişmesi ile iş hayatında ve sosyal çevrede yaşanan değişimler sonucu ortaya çıkmış olan esnek çalışma kavramını medya sektörü üzerinden anlamak ve açıklamaktır. Araştırmada nitel yöntem tercih edilmiştir ve araştırma deseni olarak fenomenoloji (olgu bilim) seçilmiştir. Esnek çalışmanın yaygın olduğu bir sektör olarak medya sektörü tercih edilmiş, sektördeki şirketlerin orta ve üst düzey yöneticileri ile yarı-yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Verilerden elde edilen 64 kod anlam bütünlüğü sağlayan 6 tema altında toplanmıştır. Araştırma sonucunda katılımcıların esnek çalışma kavramı ile Covid-19 döneminde tanıştığı ve modellerini pandemi dönemi boyunca deneyimleme fırsatı olduğu gözlemlenmiştir. Katılımcıların esnek çalışma modelleri hakkında literatürün aksine çok daha az bilgi ve deneyim sahibi olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Genellikle bir eğitimden öte o anki ihtiyaca göre bir esneklik tercihinde bulunma şeklinde iş yapılış biçimleri tanımlanmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Esnek Çalışma, Pandemi, Covid-19, Medya Sektörü, Fenomenoloji.

Flexible Working from the Perspective of Media Sector Managers

The ongoing global impact of the pandemic, coupled with technological advancements, has necessitated significant changes in the realm of work. In response to this wave of transformation, companies have increasingly begun to scrutinize traditional working models and explore alternative approaches. Particularly, confronting newly emerging waves of change can place companies in challenging positions, complicating the adaptation process.

During the pandemic, companies transitioned their employees to remote or flexible working models due to factors such as lockdowns and the risk of infection. Nonetheless, it has been observed that many companies possessed limited or no prior knowledge of these working arrangements, and moreover, the legal framework for such systems remained underdeveloped (Baycık et al., 2021; Yürekli, 2020). Given the broad scope of the flexibility concept and the variety of flexible working models, several challenges have arisen in relation to its implementation. Consequently, the central focus of our research is the issue of how this concept is perceived and applied.

An examination of studies on flexible working in Turkey reveals the use of various conceptual classifications of flexible work (Tuna & Türkmendağ, 2020; Gürses, 2018; Öztürkoğlu, 2013; Başdoğan, 2015; Şafak, 2014; Taner & Negiz, 2018). These variations in classification can be attributed to the specific contexts of implementation and the flexibility conditions that these contexts afford. Accordingly, the media sector, which inherently incorporates flexibility due to its structural characteristics, has been selected as the focus of this research.

The principal objective of this research is to analyze the concept of flexible working, which has gained significant traction in contemporary working life, within the context of the media sector. Flexible working is assessed through semi-structured interviews conducted with managers in the media sector, and the data obtained has been analyzed using content analysis. The study seeks to address the following research questions:

- How is flexible working perceived by sector managers?
- What types of flexible working models are currently known and utilized?
- What outcomes (benefits and drawbacks) has flexible working produced?
- Does flexible working contribute to a competitive advantage?

It is anticipated that the research will illuminate the applications of flexible working within the sample of the Turkish media sector. This will enhance companies' awareness of flexible working and support their understanding of alternative methods. Identifying which models are actively recognized and utilized, along with determining the advantages and disadvantages these models provide to businesses, will yield valuable insights for other practitioners. Furthermore, the research will elucidate not only the advantages that flexible working can offer to organizations and employees but also the potential disadvantages it may entail.

Literature Review

Flexible Working

The concept of flexibility emerged in the context of the economic crisis of the 1970s, which was exacerbated by the Oil Crisis of 1973. One of the primary factors contributing to its subsequent proliferation was the increasing rate of unemployment. In response to the economic downturn and with the objective of mitigating unemployment levels, flexible working models began to be incorporated into the labor market (TİSK, 1999, p. 11).

Flexibility is defined as 'the state of being adaptable, elasticity, and the capacity to adjust to changing conditions and circumstances' (TDK, 2022). In the context of business literature, flexibility encompasses the modifications made in work arrangements, career planning, and compensation systems (Seyyar & Öz, 2007).

There is currently no clear definition or established boundaries for flexible working. This concept emerges as a dynamic and evolving notion that can differ across continents, countries, companies, and even individuals.

Flexible working refers to new forms of work arrangements that do not adhere to the traditionally accepted 'eight-to-five, Monday-to-Friday' or 'working at a specific location, on specific days and hours' schedules. These arrangements are referred to as flexible working, atypical employment, or alternative work programs (Karakoyun, 2007, p. 5).

Flexibility should not be understood merely as the alteration of working hours and methods; rather, it entails a transformation of labor laws and practices through fundamental changes that align with the dynamics of the modern era and embrace new perspectives (Ekin, 1999). In the Dahrendorf Report, flexibility is defined as the ability of systems, organizations, and individuals to adapt appropriately by developing the capacity to adjust to conditions that vary according to new structures and modes of behavior (Tuncay, 2002).

The increasing demand for flexible working in today's world is driven by factors such as rapid communication, the emergence of new markets, the prevalence of short-term job designs, and swift transformations in markets (Karakaya & Uçar, 2015, p. 1).

In Turkey, the flexible working system has been considered a solution to address challenges in the labor market and reduce unemployment, gradually increasing its presence in the professional sphere. One of the main reasons for this is the acceleration in the pace of development and transformation in the field of technology. Companies must adapt to change for a better future and remain open to technological advancements and innovations (Zaim, 1990).

Research on this subject indicates that the implementation of flexible working has triggered many changes within the business world. Flexible working is proposed as a solution at the intersection of demands from work and family, potentially reducing this conflict (Booth & Van Ours, 2008). It is emphasized that flexible working enables employees to take a more active role in home and childcare (Kim, 2020) and that the flexibility provided in the work environment reduces job stress and absenteeism (Boltz et al., 2023).

On the other hand, flexible working enables women to engage in paid employment without reducing their unpaid domestic responsibilities, thereby facilitating their exploitation both at home and in the labor market (Chung et al., 2021). Furthermore, flexible working can lead to social isolation due to the lack of a specific work environment, or, through its abstract nature, contribute to job and income insecurity (Bozkurt, 2023, p. 73). Belek (2004) emphasizes that, despite all its advantages, flexible working leads to the exploitation of the working class while increasing the profit margins of capitalist enterprises. The flexible practices imposed by neoliberal policies have resulted in significant losses of rights for workers, while providing substantial cost-saving benefits for capital (Sevgi, 2023, p. 358). Another criticism of flexible working is that on-call, remote, or home-based workers are proportionally less likely to benefit from payments such as wages, compensation, and bonuses based on their hours worked. In this way, while the flexibility of the workforce is achieved on one hand, the blurring of the workplace definition makes it easier for employers to evade regulations on the other (Aydoğanoğlu, 2010).

Given the diversity of the mentioned studies and their emphasis on different aspects, it is evident that no definitive conclusion has been reached regarding both the definition of flexible working and the evaluation of its benefits and drawbacks. The concept evolves alongside technological and social changes, manifesting characteristics that allow it to adapt to the new order, much like a biological organism.

Flexible Working Models

Flexible working models are frequently preferred methods by employers to enhance employee productivity, ensure the continuity of active work, and maximize company profits, while providing employees with the freedom to choose their working hours and days (Mahiroğulları, 2005, p. 49).

Table 1

Flexible Working Models

Flexible Working Models	Definition
Part-time work	Employers utilizing the full-time working system can employ workers for shorter durations, differing from the conventional working model
Job sharing	It is the process in which multiple employees share the required tasks on a full-time basis or distribute the responsibilities necessitated by the job
Shift-based work	It refers to any work organization that extends beyond the normal 8-9 hour working duration of a company, differentiating it from standard 'daily work
Flexible working hours	It is a working model in which the employee is required to work during a specified time period as a block, while having the flexibility to determine the length of their daily working hours, as long as they do not exceed the average daily working duration within a given time frame
On-call work	The process of calling upon the workforce when needed
Compressed work week	It is the intensification of the normally practiced weekly working days through their reduction. To implement this model, working hours are increased while the number of working days is decreased
Remote work	It is the ability of the current or intermediary organization to fulfill the planned work in accordance with the agreement, allowing the employer to perform it from a location of their choice, with the employee's own home often being the preferred option.
Telecommuting	It refers to the process in which the employee manages their work externally through telecommunications tools and the internet, while being located away from the work center
Subcontracting	It refers to the process of fulfilling certain tasks required at the workplace using the workforce that is under the responsibility of another employer, rather than relying solely on the existing workforce
Lending employment relationship	It refers to the process in which an employer reallocates their existing workforce to another employer for a specified period and under an agreement

Source: Compiled from the researches of Öztürkoğlu, 2013; Şafak, 2014; Başdoğan, 2015; Kördeve, 2016; Gürses, 2018; Turan, 2017; Çelikkoparan; 2018; Serbes, 2019; Tuna & Türkmendağ 2020; Öztürk & Eyel, 2021.

Flexible working is a concept that encompasses all work practices outside the known classical working models (Selby et al., 2001). Changing environmental conditions compel businesses to develop different strategies, necessitating the creation of new working arrangements between employees and employers. For instance, in their study, Agcadağ Çelik (2021) focuses on the use and advantages of shared office spaces as a flexible working environment, while Erdayı (2021) addresses the problems arising from home-based teleworking practices. Therefore, both technological and social developments are prompting employers to explore alternative working arrangements to maintain high employee performance.

Types of flexibility are addressed under six main categories. These types are shaped by factors such as the number of employees, the training of employees to work in different departments, wages, working hours, the delegation of tasks to others, and the nature of the workplace (Erdal, 2016). Within these main elements, many new models have been developed.

It is observed that flexible working models are categorized differently in various studies. The flexible working models within the scope of this research are presented in Table 1.

Method

Design

In this study, a qualitative method was preferred in order to understand how individuals interpret their experiences and what meanings they attribute to them (Merriam, 2018, p. 5). Since the primary purpose of qualitative research is to examine specific phenomena or events in a context-sensitive manner, the researcher should evaluate the qualitative findings within their unique conditions (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013; Demirkasımoğlu, 2021). This qualitative study was conducted with a phenomenological design to provide insights into the experiences of media industry managers regarding flexible working during and after the pandemic. One of the most significant reasons for choosing qualitative research is the ability to explore the subject in depth by directly accessing emotions and thoughts, and to evaluate the phenomenon as it is.

Phenomenology is concerned with phenomena that we recognize in our lives but do not possess profound and detailed knowledge about (Gay et al., 2012, p. 121). In phenomenological design, the aim is to convey and explain the phenomenon without interpretation, based on the emotions, thoughts, and conditions of the participants (Özgener, 2005, p. 510). One of the primary reasons for selecting this design is to focus on phenomena that exist in our lives but are not fully comprehended, and to endeavor to understand individuals' perspectives and experiences regarding these phenomena (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018, p. 70). Phenomenology facilitates an understanding of "what it is like to experience" a phenomenon by revealing the perceptual and attitudinal orientations of individuals who encounter these phenomena. (Munhall, 2007). The primary aim of phenomenological research, which addresses individuals' conscious and intentional actions, is to uncover rich and complex descriptions that emerge within the context where the phenomenon occurs, thereby revealing embedded and experiential meanings (Finlay, 2009: 6). Based on this approach, participants of varying ages and experiences were asked to convey the phenomenon of flexible work in relation to their own subjective experiences. Through the phenomenological design, comprehensive findings were obtained regarding how the phenomenon of flexible work was constructed as a process by participants—both before, during, and after the experience—and the meanings underlying these experiences.

Participants

The target population of this research consists of senior executives working in media companies located on the European side of Istanbul. One of the main reasons for selecting the media sector as the research

population is the intensive application of flexible working practices in this sector both before and after the pandemic, as well as the frequent experimentation with various models. However, it is not feasible to interview all companies and executives within such a large sector. On the other hand, phenomenological studies indicate that interviewing between six and ten individuals, with a minimum of six, is sufficient (Creswell et al., 2003; Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007, p. 289). Based on this information, interviews were conducted with 11 senior executives working in the media sector on the European side of Istanbul.

Initially, a request for an interview was sent to the executives in the sector via email, proposing a date they deemed appropriate. While meetings were planned with those who responded, the process encountered a bottleneck at a certain point, leading to difficulties in reaching individuals within the sample. As a result, the snowball sampling method was employed. In this method, the researcher asks each participant to refer others who may be able to participate in the study (Altunışık et al., 2007). Based on these referrals, interviews were conducted, and this process continued until saturation of the sample was reached. Data obtained from the interviews with a total of 11 senior executives were then analyzed.

Five of the participants are male and six are female, with their ages ranging from 26 to 45. Among the participants, six are single and five are married. Their managerial experience varies from 3 to 25 years, with an average of 10 years. All participants hold senior executive positions and engage in flexible work. The variations in age and experience levels among managers are noteworthy. Since phenomenological research seeks to understand how participants subjectively experience a specific phenomenon, involving participants from different age and experience groups can yield rich and multidimensional insights. In fact, capturing distinct perspectives from both less and more experienced managers may enhance the depth of our understanding. Nevertheless, challenges related to comparability and generalizability could arise. Given that the diversity of participants contributes to the core research question and that the study does not aim to produce generalizable findings, this diversity does not necessarily imply bias.

Table 2

Characteristics of Participants

No	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Title	Management Experience (Year)
1	Male	40	Maried	Chief Digital Officer	20
2	Female	45	Maried	CEO	25
3	Male	26	Single	Head	3
4	Male	38	Maried	Director	5
5	Female	42	Single	Associate Chief Officer	20
6	Female	37	Maried	Director	5
7	Male	25	Single	Manager	3
8	Female	35	Single	Director	6
9	Male	37	Maried	Director	8
10	Female	35	Single	Manager	3
11	Female	40	Single	Director	11

Data Collection

In qualitative research, the interview technique is one of the most commonly used data collection methods. The data for this study were collected using a semi-structured interview technique. With this technique, participants were asked pre-prepared questions in a specific order, and in cases deemed necessary, additional questions were posed to gather detailed information (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013, p. 42). A structured interview form was designed utilizing insights from various studies (Öztürkoğlu, 2013; Şafak, 2014; Başdoğan, 2015; Kördeve, 2016; Gürses, 2018; Turan, 2017; Çelikkoparan, 2018; Taner & Negiz, 2018; Tuna & Türkmendağ, 2020; Geyik Küçük & Aydınlı Kulak, 2020; Serbes, 2019; Öztürk & Eyel, 2021). Seven questions were posed to gather detailed information regarding the primary issue of the study, which pertains to "how flexible work is perceived and implemented".

The interviews with participants were conducted between June 10 and November 10, 2023. Some of the interviews were held face-to-face, while others were conducted via video calls or telephone conversations at the participants' request due to work circumstances or transportation issues in Istanbul. The duration of the interviews ranged from 15 to 45 minutes, with the length being influenced by the participants' responses to the questions and the need for follow-up inquiries.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data employed content analysis as the preferred method. Qualitative content analysis is a systematic approach used to examine qualitative data. This method provides opportunities to analyze explicit and descriptive content that results in categories, as well as implicit and interpretive content that leads to themes (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Content analysis consists of four fundamental stages. Firstly, the obtained data are divided into meaningful segments, and the conceptual significance of each segment is determined. In the second stage, the coded data, classified according to their common characteristics, are organized under themes that convey general meaning. In the third stage, the data arranged according to themes and codes are described and explained in comprehensible language. Finally, the findings are interpreted, and conclusions are drawn (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018, pp. 239-251).

A foundational framework supported by literature was established for the preparation of interview questions. The codings were derived through thematic coding, considering the conceptual framework. Before the data analysis, the initial conceptual structure was reshaped by integrating newly discovered findings, codes, and themes during the analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The codes generated through thematic coding were re-examined, and duplicates were merged and reduced. Subsequently, the reviewed codes were organized under the identified themes, along with the literature and questions. The codes and themes were finalized after consulting with experts. In the qualitative analysis process, no analysis software was utilized; the data were manually coded.

Ethical Concerns

Prior to the interviews, participants were provided with information regarding the purpose and scope of the research, and their verbal consent was obtained. Participants were informed about the recording of the interviews and the subsequent transcription process, and the necessary permissions were secured. They were assured that their names and information related to their organizations would remain confidential, and demographic characteristics would be specified. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board for the research. Access to the research data (audio recordings, files) is restricted solely to the researchers involved in the study.

<div align="center">Results</div>

This section of the research shares the findings obtained from interviews conducted with executives in the media sector regarding flexible work arrangements. In the initial phase of analysis, a total of 920 codes were generated. Redundant codes that expressed similar meanings or appeared unnecessary or meaningless were eliminated, resulting in a final set of 64 codes. Ultimately, these 64 codes were grouped under six themes that provide coherence in meaning. The themes are as follows:

- Change Before and After Covid-19
- Perception of Flexible Working
- Flexible Working Experiences
- Learning Processes
- Outcomes of Flexible Working
- Competitive Advantage

Change Before and After Covid-19

The primary focus of our first theme is to understand the changes experienced in the work life during the pandemic and to relate these changes to flexible working. The majority of participants characterize this period with negative experiences. Codes such as "increased online meetings, elimination of break times, the concept of working hours has disappeared, and more intense work" have been frequently mentioned. When evaluating these codes, employees have expressed that the notion of time in work life has diminished with the onset of the Covid-19 period, and they have become more accessible. The previously common sentiment of "the workday is over; now I can focus on my personal life" has nearly vanished. However, some participants who approached the process differently emphasized the acquisition of new skills and a decrease in work intensity.

Table 3

Change Before and After Covid-19

Codes	Theme
Increased online meetings	
Elimination of break times	
The concept of working hours has disappeared	
Being reachable at any time	Change Before and After
New skills have emerged	Covid-19
Investments decreased, and work lightened	
Increased work intensity	
Demand for work on weekends or after six o'clock	

Individuals have become perpetually accessible due to flexible working arrangements, rendering work requests possible at any time during working hours. Participant K1, who characterizes the process negatively, and participant K8, who views it positively, have articulated their thoughts as follows:

"Transitioning to the remote work model resulted in a significant alteration in scheduling compared to the office environment. There is no longer a clear start or end time for working hours, nor is there a designated lunch break. Working in the office was more social; we were more flexible." K1.

"In our sector, a significant decline occurred due to the shock experienced during the first two months of the pandemic. With the decrease in investments, our workload has also eased. However, we experienced a pause in progressing with our tasks because we were uncertain about how to move

forward." K8

Perception of Flexible Working

In the second theme, the aim is to understand what participants perceive when they hear the term flexible working and what associations it evokes for them. An evaluation of the responses provided by the participants reveals that the codes related to flexible working are discussed in both positive and negative aspects.

Table 4

Perception of Flexible Working

Codes	Categories	Theme
Time and space flexibility		
Ability to work from any location		
To achieve autonomy	Positive	
Ability to adjust working hours and duration		
Work comfort		Perception of Flexible Working
Longer working hours		
Absence of fixed working hours		
Work intensity		
Lack of balance between work-personal life	Negative	
Being reachable at any time		
Absence of clear rules		

Participants who perceive flexible working positively have articulated that it grants them freedom, simplifies their lives due to the provision of both time and location flexibility, and allows them to allocate more time to themselves. In this context, one of our participants, K5, stated:

"When I think of flexible working, I envision a discipline of working independent of time and days. However, I believe that the flexible working implemented is not properly understood by institutions. Starting work at 9:00 AM from home is not the same as starting work at 9:00 AM from the office; this does not constitute a 'flexible working' discipline. I think a flexible working environment can be created if you can organize the delivery deadlines for the work to be done, whether individually or with your team members."

A group of participants, however, has evaluated the concept negatively, believing that flexible working disrupts the existing work-life balance and leads to increased workload. Some participants have expressed the following views on this matter:

"Actually, the first thing that comes to mind is not working from home or in the office, but rather being asked to work on weekends or after 6 PM." (K7)

"Unfortunately, when I think of flexible working, I envision a system where I can adjust my own schedule, but instead, it represents a negative connotation of excessive overtime." (K10)

Flexible Working Experiences

The third theme encompasses findings related to the flexible working models that have been implemented following the transition to flexible working. When assessing which models mentioned in the literature the participants are aware of, which ones they recognize, and which ones they utilize, a total of 12 codes have emerged.

Table 5

Flexible Working Experiences

Codes	Theme
Hybrid working	
Remote working and telecommuting	
Model offering options to employees	
Four-Day workweek	
Flexible office days	
Working at night	
One day in the office per month	Flexible Working Experiences
Monday-Friday holiday work schedule	
Open office	
Working from outside of the city	
8 hours at your convenience	
On-call work model	

Participants reported that they explored different models to ensure continuity in their work arrangements, adapting to the evolving circumstances of the process. In determining these models, the current situation and conditions were assessed, and work continued with the system that was believed to be most effective. One participant, K5, described their experience of trying out various work models as follows:

"After the first case appeared in Turkey in March, we quickly organized and adapted our entire technical infrastructure to a remote work system. Therefore, with the initial emergence of the pandemic, we chose the method of working from home. We continued in this manner for a long time. Later, our process of utilizing a hybrid office began. We opened the office primarily on a voluntary basis. We did not make it mandatory, but we allowed those who preferred not to work from home, who struggled to adapt to the home ecosystem, and those who wanted to socialize and were feeling isolated to come into the office. At times, this raised the question of which home this remote work referred to."

The topic of reducing the number of working days during the week, which has been implemented or experimented with in various countries, has also been evaluated by the participants. For instance, Participant K1 stated the following:

"I see the four-day work week as a model worth trying. I believe it has already been implemented in countries like Belgium and Iceland. Recent studies indicate that working four days a week leads to significantly higher productivity. There is data that should be taken seriously, showing that this model enhances daily productivity more than the traditional five-day work week."

Learning Processes

The fourth theme presents findings on how participants learned about flexible working models. When examining their learning processes, it becomes evident that none of the participants had received prior training on this topic. Instead, they reported that they learned about flexible working out of necessity during the COVID-19 period, as precautionary measures and lockdowns made flexible working arrangements compulsory.

Table 6

Learning Processes

Codes	Theme
Through experience	
Alongside the process	
Due to Covid-19	Learning Processes
During the pandemic period	

Participants indicate that the learning process related to flexible working did not involve prior preparation or planning; instead, it progressed through overcoming the challenges brought by the pandemic and, more importantly, through direct experience.

"We did not have such a system on our agenda before the pandemic, so we learned it during the COVID process without receiving any training; we fully integrated into the process." (K7)

"It became a part of our lives with the pandemic. Prior to this, I only knew of it as an arrangement for freelancers." (K6)

The topic of training was also evaluated by the participants during the learning process. While some emphasized that training is essential, others highlighted that adaptation could be achieved easily through a trial-and-error approach.

"All the details should be provided, and decisions should be made according to the company dynamics. There is no precise information about flexible working models. The models applied around are assumed to be flexible working." (K9)

"I don't think training is necessary; agencies are constantly adapting systems, and we can easily adapt to such changes." (K3)

"I didn't receive any training, but I don't think it's needed in the digital world anymore. Life is now more challenging for those who cannot or have not adapted." (K11)

Outcomes of Flexible Working

The fifth theme encompasses findings related to the outcomes that flexible working provides to businesses. A total of 25 codes were identified, and these codes were categorized into two groups: the advantages and disadvantages of flexible working. Participants approached the outcomes from a broad perspective, sharing insights on a range of topics, from work processes to commute times, from family relations to social interactions, and from cost reductions to the time individuals can allocate to themselves. Below are the thoughts of K3, K4, and K7 regarding the advantageous aspects of flexible working.

"I can be flexible depending on my child's situation. When work is finished, I am at home with my family. It makes planning easier for me." (K3)

"In the remote working arrangement, the time spent on commuting is eliminated, and you can adjust your working hours throughout the day according to your work situation. Additionally, there is a reduction in traffic congestion and overcrowding in public transport during working hours, which is advantageous." (K4)

"There has been a reduction in controllable and sustainable costs. The costs of logistical activities have decreased (such as kitchen, transportation, and secretarial expenses)." (K7)

Table 7

Outcomes of Flexible Working

Codes	Categories	Theme
Efficient use of time		
Cost advantage		
Traffic benefits		
Spending ample time with loved ones		
Increased work productivity		
Reduced distractions		
Emergence of new skills	Advantages	
Decrease in work-family conflict		
Partial utilization of talented individuals		
Improved family bonds		
Acquisition of new people and networks		
Learning manage anxiety		Outcomes of Flexible Working
Reduced resource consumption		
Lack of communication		
Inability to reach everyone at the same pace		
Psychological issues		
Internet Access difficulties		
Decrease in the sense of belonging		
Ineffective and incomplete training		
Absence of organizational culture	Disadvantages	
Inefficiency in rapid work		
Distrust		
Potential weakening of socialization		
Reduced knowledge exchange		
Feelings of deprivation from the team and isolation		

The disadvantages of flexible working highlight various issues such as the establishment of organizational culture, the sense of trust among employees, and the inefficiency of online meetings. Participants K1, K4, and K5 expressed the following regarding the disadvantages of flexible working:

"Is my employee truly engaged in their work? There is a sense of insecurity and a lack of control over employees who might evade their responsibilities. It will not be easy to monitor a large number of individuals in large organizations." (K1)

"The development of a sense of belonging has been hindered. Trainings have been ineffective and incomplete, and an organizational culture could not be established." (K4)

"Particularly in media planning agencies like ours, a great deal of importance is placed on ideas and projects. When a new brief is received, it is possible to quickly gather with available team members for brainstorming sessions, leading to the production of excellent work. Of course, we also conduct brainstorming sessions via Teams, but I believe that brainstorming conducted in meeting rooms is significantly more effective." (K5)

Competitive Advantage

The final theme focuses on the evaluations regarding how flexible working can provide a competitive advantage. It is emphasized that flexible working is particularly prominent in attracting qualified personnel, operating globally, and digitalization in the job preferences of the new generation.

Table 8

Competitive Advantage

Codes	Theme
FW is a determining factor for employees' preferences	
FW provides a competitive advantage	
The full office system is not widely accepted	Competitive Advantage
FW is a criterion for retaining the future workforce	

Participants' thoughts on the points where flexible working provides a competitive advantage are as follows:

"The flexibility it offers to employees is a significant criterion, as it expands the boundaries beyond their place of residence and provides opportunities to work with global firms. We are experiencing this firsthand; employees are definitely choosing companies that offer flexible working models." (K8)

"From a competitive standpoint, everything is becoming digital; even psychologists are now offering online therapy. Appointments with family doctors can now be made via Zoom, and online treatment is available in the e-Nabız system. All professions are transitioning to digital, and the era of traditional offices is coming to an end." (K3)

"In recruitment processes, many applicants prefer agencies that offer a work-from-home model. This arrangement allows for collaboration with employees from different cities. This is particularly advantageous for attracting young talents to the industry and in terms of employee costs. Certainly, it is no longer just about the salary; young people today value both flexibility and the ability to work while traveling. Perhaps one of the most important criteria for retaining Generation Z in our workforce is this."

Discussion

The study aims to understand the concept of flexible working from the perspective of media sector managers and to evaluate its practical implications. Six themes have emerged from the data, and a discussion has been presented based on the relationships between these themes and the existing literature.

Participants have evaluated the changes in work practices during the pandemic, considering both their positive and negative aspects, similarly to the findings in the literature (Açıkgöz & Mutlu, 2022; Tuna & Türkmendağ, 2020). Some studies emphasize the insufficiency of the current regulations regarding remote work and highlight the need for necessary legal adjustments (Baycık et al., 2021; Yürekli, 2020). Due to its structural characteristics, the media sector has quickly adapted to the process of flexible working; however, the uncertainties and experienced challenges during this period have contributed to the development of new talents.

The concept of flexible working has also been evaluated by participants, taking into account both its positive and negative aspects, much like the pandemic process. The majority of participants defined

flexible work as the ability to work from home, remotely, or from any desired location at any time. The perception of flexible working varies depending on the adjustment process to change and the emotional state during the transition. Those who perceive this process negatively tend to evaluate the concept through characteristics such as overtime and constant availability, often ignoring its positive aspects despite being aware of them. In contrast, those who view the concept positively describe it as an opportunity to allocate time to their families, loved ones, and themselves, while being able to perform their tasks without stepping outside their comfort zones.

Flexible working can be interpreted differently based on industry, gender, and educational background (Chung & Van der Lippe, 2020; Yıldırım, 2019; Doğan et al., 2015). For instance, a study conducted in Poland indicates that while flexible work is generally perceived positively by young employees, it also highlights negative effects such as the difficulty of separating household responsibilities from professional duties and social isolation (Beňo, 2021). Serbes (2019) emphasizes that while flexible working has a positive impact on work-life balance, this effect is insufficient, and flexible working should be further developed and tested in various forms. Therefore, there are participants who evaluate the process based on its effects on social relationships, as well as those who adopt a self-centered perspective, leading to different interpretations of the process. Furthermore, care must be taken to ensure that the flexibility provided does not turn into exploitation of labor (Belek, 2004). In this context, it is crucial that state regulations and oversight mechanisms actively work to prevent the flexibility enabled by the "Omnibus Law" from becoming a tool for employers to leverage over employees.

The findings reveal that, contrary to the literature, there is much less awareness and implementation of various flexible working types, highlighting a focus on a single type characterized by the mindset of "the best way is the one you know. In the media sector, flexible working models such as remote work, part-time work, telecommuting, job sharing, and on-call work are utilized. Participants have experienced different types of flexibility based on the course of the pandemic and the regulations implemented by the government regarding working life. However, they have gained experience primarily through trial and error rather than through a planned process or training. Working hours for media professionals are quite flexible, often resulting in the cancellation of weekend breaks and the need to pursue news until late at night (Bayram, 2015).

The fundamental characteristics of the new media sector are identified as technology, decentralization, education, and reduced costs. Particularly due to technological advancements, the necessity of being confined to a single physical location within the sector has been eliminated, leading to a significant increase in educational needs (Gürcan & Kumcuoğlu, 2017). Moreover, these developments have transformed the perception of ownership within media organizations, as the need for substantial capital has shifted towards an emphasis on knowledge and resources (Akgül & Ayer, 2018). Consequently, it is crucial to learn and systematically implement flexible working models to adapt to the rapidly evolving structure of the industry.

The aforementioned studies indicate that flexible work models are still in the early stages of experimentation in Turkey, and their implications are being evaluated from both employee and legal perspectives. Indeed, certain flexible work models are being implemented in ways that differ significantly from those described in the literature. This leads to the conclusion that, in the future, not only could new models be introduced, but existing ones might also undergo further development and transformation.

The findings reveal that flexible work was learned somewhat out of necessity during the pandemic. It has been emphasized that the process developed organically and was automatically integrated into operations. The rapid evolution of the pandemic placed both the private sector and public domain in a challenging position regarding the measures and decisions that needed to be implemented. Sectors that

are inherently flexible were able to swiftly transition to various flexible working practices.

The media sector has adapted to various types of flexible work through a trial-and-error approach, driven by the necessities of the current situation, often without a solid theoretical foundation. While this matter tends to be secondary in the public sector, the private sector—particularly qualified consulting firms—has undertaken initiatives to address the necessary steps (MindTools, Indeed, Better Up, 06.03.2024). Furthermore, participants expressed differing views on the provision of training for flexible work; one group argued for the necessity of such training, while the other contended that integration into the work environment could occur naturally over time, suggesting that additional training might be superfluous in terms of both financial and time resources.

The overall reduction in costs and the escape from heavy traffic in Istanbul are particularly highlighted as advantages of flexible working. Conversely, disadvantages such as distrust between employers and employees, weakened socialization, feelings of team deficiency, and isolation have been emphasized.

The flexible and remote working systems that gained prominence during the pandemic and were encouraged through incentive packages are likely to continue showing their positive impacts in the subsequent period (Eşsiz & Durucan, 2021). Flexible working stands out due to its benefits, such as the effective use of time spent in traffic, the ability to engage with family members, and the reduction of various expenses for employers (Dockery & Bawa, 2020; Akca & Tepe, 2020). Additionally, benefits such as the ability to respond quickly to customer needs and expectations, the prevention of waste, and increased capacity utilization also provide a competitive advantage (Çelenk & Atmaca, 2010). However, requests to come to the workplace may conflict temporally, part-time employees may not develop a sense of belonging to the organization, and administrative costs may be comparable to those of full-time employees. Communication gaps may arise for those who share jobs, and oversight may become challenging. In flexible work schedules, energy costs may increase due to prolonged operating hours, communication issues may occur with superiors, and in teleworking models, employee status can become ambiguous (Öztürkoğlu, 2013). At this point, the preference for a flexible working model should not be imposed from the top down; rather, it should involve a decision-making process centered on needs and include employees in the process, thereby maximizing benefits for both parties.

Overall, it can be stated that the concept is not fully understood, there are legal gaps, detailed information about its types is lacking, and as a result, there are challenges in the adaptation process. However, the media sector has not been as severely affected by the process as other sectors due to its flexible and continuously evolving nature, and has been able to adapt more quickly to some extent. Particularly, the shift of the sector's working environment to the digital realm has facilitated this flexibility and provided the media sector a new perspective (Demir, 2023).

In the final theme, all participants collectively emphasized that flexible working has emerged as a highly significant system in terms of competition. It is noted that the new generations entering the job market are aware of this system and are demanding to work within it. Companies that do not offer flexible work models are at risk of losing qualified talent, as the traditional system of working all day in an office is increasingly seen as less acceptable by employees. Factors such as the structural shift of the sector towards digital platforms, the transition to technology-based operations, and the growing number of freelancers contribute to the importance of flexible working in attracting and retaining qualified talent.

Conclusion and Limitations

The question of where we would be in terms of implementing flexible working if the pandemic had not occurred is a crucial point. While many countries around the world are striving to seize and learn from every opportunity to enhance productivity among employees, waiting for things to happen poses a threat in sectors characterized by high competitiveness.

On the other hand, there are perspectives that view flexibility as a political choice in search of alternative solutions to economic crises, noting that this choice shifts the burden of the crisis onto labor (Şen, 2001; Belek, 2004). At this point, as we adopt and implement the concept, we should aim for it to benefit businesses in our country, while also ensuring that it enhances employee welfare rather than adopting a populist approach.

It is evident that sector managers require comprehensive training to fully benefit from flexible working. However, some participants advocate for learning through experience, while others recognize the necessity of education. It should be understood by both groups that both theoretical knowledge and experiential learning provide an opportunity for lasting learning.

Another suggestion is that the new generation will enter the workforce with different characteristics, qualifications, and, more importantly, different expectations. One of the primary expectations of this new workforce pertains to flexible working conditions. Being knowledgeable in this area and offering job opportunities based on flexible work is crucial for attracting qualified labor.

Due to the alternative work opportunities that flexible working provides, offering different options to employees with varying personalities is essential for maximizing benefits. Therefore, to obtain greater productivity from individuals with different characteristics—such as independent workers, those who thrive in quiet environments, social workers, team players, etc.—it is necessary to understand and implement various types of alternative working arrangements.

Flexible working is gradually being implemented in our country. In this context, research can be conducted across different sectors to compare how it is perceived and evaluated in various industries. Additionally, the learning aspect of this subject presents itself as a separate issue. Investigating where and how this can be learned, as well as who could provide the necessary training, is seen as a topic that needs further exploration.

Our research, in addition to its theoretical limitations, has focused solely on managers within the context of the population-sample framework. The concept can also be evaluated from the perspective of employees. Moreover, the study did not concentrate on a specific sub-sector within the media industry. Comparisons can be made based on practices in subfields such as journalism, television, radio, and cinema.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Ethical Approval

Author Contributions

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