T.C.
SAKARYA UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

THE MODERATING ROLE OF CHANGE EFFICACY ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHANGE READINESS AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT FOR ARAB EMPLOYEES IN SMES

MASTERS THESIS

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I Could not have done it alone.

Dalya Alnajjar

18.08.2021

DEDICATION

To Gaza, the land of pain and hope.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANOVA   : Analysis of Variance
CE   : Change Efficacy
COGRE   : Cognitive Readiness
COVID-19   : Corona Virus Disease of 2019
CR   : Change Readiness
EE   : Employee Engagement
EMRE   : Emotional Readiness
GCC   : Gulf Cooperation Council
HR   : Human Resource
HRM   : Human Resource Management
HRSS   : HR System Strength
INRE   : Intentional Readiness
ME   : Middle East
OC   : Organizational Change
SHRM   : Strategic Human Resource Management
SME   : Small and Medium enterprise
SPSS   : Statistical Package for Social Sciences
WFH   : Work from Home

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The ongoing crisis of COVID-19 is considered as a rehearsal for the future of work. Indeed, working from home has become the new normal for many Arab employees across the Middle East for the first time. This study is attempting to investigate the moderating effect of change efficacy on the relationship between change readiness and employee engagement in an unplanned shift of work settings to working from home. Change readiness is a critical facilitator element for conducting any organizational change. Whereas, employee engagement, is a predictor of a variety of positive work outcomes such as performance thus it is key for organizations to maintain employee engagement during times of change. Change readiness and employee engagement are both essential aspects of managing a crisis. Moreover, change efficacy is the capacity of employees to enact changes, is a pragmatic variable for predicting behavioral change and performance, and it affects all types of change readiness. Consequently, these three factors are paramount to traversing such a sudden adjustment in work settings. Hence, studying them will provide valuable insights to bridge the existing research gap on the matter.

A questionnaire of three measuring instruments was used to collect data for this study and was sent electronically to 425 Arab, white-collar, full-time, private-sector employees of SMEs for Arab employees. The findings of this study suggested the existence of a moderate relationship between change readiness and employee engagement and that change efficacy moderates the relationship in the context of unplanned change in SMEs for Arab employees.

Keywords: WFH, Change readiness, Work engagement, Change efficacy, Remote work, Arab.

Sakarya Üniversitesi, İşletme Enstitüsü	**Yüksek Lisans Tez Özeti**
Tezin Başlığı: Kobi'lerdeki Arap Çalışanlar İçin Değişime Hazır Bulunmanın ve İşe Adanmanın Arasındaki İlişkide Değişim Yeterliğini Düzenleyici Etkisi.	
Tezin Yazarı: Dalya ALNJJAR	**Danışman:** Prof. Dr. Şuayyip ÇALIŞ
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Devam eden COVID-19 krizi, iş hayatinin geleceği için bir prova olarak kabul edilmektedir. Gerçekten de evden çalışma Orta Doğu'daki birçok çalışan için ilk kez yeni bir normal haline geldi. Bu çalışma, çalışma şartlarının evden çalışmaya geçişinde planlanmamış bir değişiklikte değişime hazır bulunma ve işe adanma arasındaki ilişki üzerindeki değişimin yeterliliğini düzenleyici etkisini araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Değişime hazır bulunma, kasıtlı, bilişsel ve duygusal boyutları ile herhangi bir örgütsel değişikliği yürütmek için kritik bir kolaylaştırıcı unsurdur. Öte yandan işe angaje olması, performans gibi çeşitli olumlu iş sonuçlarının bir yordayıcısıdır, bu nedenle kuruluşların değişim zamanlarında işe adanmanı sürdürmeleri çok önemlidir. Değişime hazır bulunma ve işe adanma, başarılı bir örgütsel değişimden geçmenin temel unsurlarıdır. Ayrıca, değişiklik yeterliği çalışanların değişiklikleri gerçekleştirme kapasitesidir. Bu davranışsal değişim ve performansı tahmin etmek için pragmatik bir değişkendir. Sonuç olarak, bu üç faktör çalışma ortamlarında bu tür ani bir ayarlamadan geçmek için çok önemlidir. Bu nedenle, onları incelemek akademi için değerli bilgiler sağlayacak ve konuyla ilgili sınırlı araştırma boşluğunu dolduracaktır.

Bu çalışmaya veri toplamak için üç ölçme aracını içeren bir anket kullanılmış ve Orta Doğu'daki KOBİ'lerin 425 Arap beyaz yakalı, tam zamanlı, özel sektör çalışanına elektronik olarak gönderilmiştir. Bu çalışmanın bulguları, değişime hazır olma ve çalışan bağlılığı arasında orta düzeyde bir ilişkinin varlığını ve Orta Doğu'daki KOBİ'lerde plansız değişim bağlamında değişim etkinliğinin ilişkiyi yumuşattığını ortaya koymuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Evden çalışma**,** Değişime hazır bulunma, işe adanma, Değişimin yeterliği, Uzaktan çalışma, Arap.

INTRODUCTION

"All great changes are preceded by chaos."

_ Deepak Chopra, 2018

The range of changes occurring amidst the COVID-19 pandemic opens a new horizon for researchers in a variety of fields. Human Resource researchers are particularly interested in investigating remote work changes and balancing work and life when they are primarily interrelated. Such research will help drawing the image of future workplaces and define the consequences of the sudden shift to work from home during the lockdown. The chaos created by the pandemic in organizations will reveal modifications in many of the work concepts that will reshape the future in different ways. Day by day, the sea of changes level goes down as adaptation occurs and the iceberg of the changes erect higher exposing more data making the future directions clearer. This study steps itself from other research by studying an ongoing change.

Research Objectives

This study is especially interested in researching the relationship between change readiness and employee engagement with change efficacy as a moderating variable for Arab employees who worked or are working from home during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the Middle East. This study will explore Arab employee's change readiness during their work from home experiences. In addition, it will check the level of employees' engagement during their work from home. And finally, this study will explain how change efficacy plays a role in moderating the relationship between employees' change readiness and engagement.

Research Problem and Questions

The SMEs in the Middle East had not experienced remote work broadly before; since remote work was one way to sustain businesses while combating the deadly virus, it is interesting to dive beyond working from home and understand how employees' change readiness, engagement and change efficacy affects sudden changes in the workplace. The overall aim of this study is to explore the relationship between readiness to change

and work engagement during a sudden adjustment in work settings with change efficacy as a moderating factor. The research questions guiding this study were as follows:

1. What is the relationship between the change readiness and employee engagement for Arab employees in SMEs in the Middle East during unplanned work settings adjustment?

2. Does change efficacy moderate the relationship between change readiness and employee engagement during unplanned work settings adjustment?

As per the sub-objectives of this study, they are described as following:

1. To assess change readiness among Arab employees in SMEs throughout a drastic unplanned adjustment in work settings.

2. To evaluate change readiness level and how it differs among demographics.

3. To examine Arab employees' engagement in SMEs and how they differ among demographics.

4. To find out how change-efficacy affects the relationship between readiness to change and employee engagement.

Research Significance

Although the existing research on the research variables has accumulated a vast body of knowledge and thereby has helped build an understanding of how these variables interact with different HR practices (Matthysen & Harris, 2018). Yet, in the literature, there is limited empirical research regarding change readiness and employee engagement in Work from Home (WFH) settings (Matthysen & Harris, 2018). And no previous research combined these variables in a sudden work adjustment with change efficacy as a moderating factor; therefore, it is believed that this study will provide valuable insights for both managers and academia.

For academia the study contributes to the research of an ongoing organizational change and provide a snapshot of the employees' change readiness, engagement, and change efficacy. Moreover, it studies the Arab employees with their different demographic characteristics and offers insights about their adaptability and ability to adopt sudden changes in the workplace.

On the other hand, the results of this study will be helpful for managers and practitioners, as it directs the focus of management to important variables that facilitate and support sudden organizational change. It also shows what variables the management should cultivate and invest in developing.

Besides, highlighting current events and researching their consequences will provide tremendous value to all future research related to the future of work and work from home during crisis times. Also, future research directions suggest the importance of researching the effect of context on HR practices (Liu et al., 2019) which refines the interpretations of employee behavior (Gerhart, 2009). The findings of this study will be critical at various levels. Moreover, the timing of the research and studying an ongoing phenomenon is unique and offers new perspectives.

Research Method

The research model shown in chapter 1 will be investigated by empirical research. This study will be conducted using abductive reasoning. Abductive reasoning is a research approach aims at explaining unique research questions that current theories cannot answer, it aims at providing the best answers to research questions (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This study adopts convenient sampling method which consists of easy-to-reach and contact respondents. The study's sample consists of Arab, white-collar, full-time, private-sector employees of SMEs in 19 countries in the Middle East. The sample has no age restrictions and ranges from 20 years old to 65 years old.

There was no researcher interference. The study setting is non contrived, which means no alteration were conducted in the samples' environment. The unit of analysis is employees. It is proven that employees are not passive recipients of the organizational change but rather active actors and responders to change in their environments (Choi, 2011) thus researching their change readiness, engagement and change efficacy is deemed beneficial. And the time horizon of the study is cross-sectional which means this study is a snapshot for the Arab employees during their work from home during covid-19 lockdowns. The questionnaire was distributed online as a google form link via different social media platforms. While using this technique facilitate reaching to a wider group of respondents it does not provide a response rate.

Both descriptive and inferential statistics generated by SPSS 18 were used to analyze the data of this study. Descriptive analyses were used to describe the research data; on the other hand, inferential statistics provided insights to enable generalization about the experience of work from home for the employees who participated in the study. To test the statistically significant differences between research variables, correlations, T-tests, and analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used. To explain the effect of the moderating variable's effect on the relationship between the dependent and dependent variable, path analysis was used.

Research Limitation

Due to the limitation of resources and accessibility, the study surveyed only 425 Arab employees from 19 countries. A larger sample would generate more accurate results. Since this study explores findings in a contemporary setting, there are limited scholarly papers and research on the topic. Moreover, this is a cross-sectional study and provides results for a specific point in time. The research variables should be studied in a longitudinal study in the future after the pandemic is declared over. With the continually changing nature of the crisis, the uncertainty, and the changing facts lead to different results at different times.

Thesis Structure

This research consists of three chapters: Background, Literature Review, and Research design and methods and Discussion and conclusion. The first chapter, background, sets the reader to understand the research scope with a brief introduction, listing the purpose of the research, the significance of the study, the assumptions used in this study, the methodology that was employed to conduct the study, the research model and the limitations of the study.

The relevant literature review is presented in chapter two which examines the previous studies and literature regarding the study concepts with a focus on the theoretical framework and conceptual framework. In this chapter, literature reviews of change readiness, employee engagement, change-efficacy, and remote work are presented.

Chapter three discusses the method, including the sample, the procedure, the research instruments, and the statistical tests used to analyze the data. Moreover, the research

objective and design are discussed. This chapter also include research findings in detail. The descriptive statistics for demographic variables are discussed, regression analysis and path analysis followed by a summary of the hypothesis results. Finally, this chapter also includes analysis of the study's variable dimensions among the respondents. The conclusion explains and evaluates the research findings and how it relates to the literature review and research questions, leading to an overall conclusion. It also highlights the limitations and shares recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND

This chapter sets the ground to understand the research scope with a brief introduction, purpose of the research, the significance of the study, the assumptions used in this study, the methodology that was employed to conduct the study and finally the research model.

1.1. Introduction

There is no doubt that our lives are being reshaped by the ongoing COVID-19 crisis (Malkawi et al., 2020). We are being introduced to new work and learning arrangements and a novel lifestyle. It is logical to assume that we were an unplanned pilot for the future work environment. Following the declaration of COVID-19 as a pandemic, businesses started to work remotely, which presented a significant challenge for SMEs with limited infrastructure and capacity to move their functions to the digital arena.

By mid-April 2020, fifty-nine countries ordered their nonessential public sector employees to work from home (ILO, 2020). Furthermore, whether in lockdown or not, businesses worldwide are encouraged to adopt working from home strategies as possible to implement social distancing. Companies strove to strike a balance between business continuity and employee wellbeing while complying with the changing status quo. With the infection curve flattening in many countries since June 2020, governments eased restrictions, which raised questions about the utilization of benefits of the WFH pilot for both employers and workers without losing the workplace's social and economic value. While remote work has been under a lot of scrutiny and research in the last decade, the number of companies with plans and infrastructure in the Middle East is limited. Middle East employment portal Gulf Talent (2020) published a survey of 1,600 company professionals in GCC countries. Their findings showed that 35 percent of employers in the Gulf said they would switch staff to work from home. On the other hand, 54% of survey respondents did not have WFH plans, while 11% said they do not consider the possibility of a WFH setting. With remote work being a novel concept for the vast majority of businesses in the region, the survey found that many were preparing the technical and organizational infrastructure necessary for work from home settings. At such times, employee engagement and change readiness are critical

for optimizing performance and reaching organizational objectives. The silver lining of the COVID-19 emergency could be found in the falling barriers to improvisation and digital experimentation that have emerged worldwide. Furthermore, this crisis shortened the time on the adoption curves that bode well for the future of the WFH.

Change readiness was first introduced as a concept by Schein and Bennis (1967). It is 'the extent to which organizational members are psychologically and behaviorally prepared to implement organizational change" (Shea et al., 2014). However, the research on change readiness is limited. The main researcher on change readiness is Bryan Weiner, who employed motivation theory and social cognitive theory to construct his theory on change readiness in 2009. Weiner is cited more than 1400 times on change readiness, such as in the following research (Rafferty et al., 2013; Bedser, 2013; Gärtner, 2013; Amis and Aïssaoui, 2013; Alzyoud et al. 2014; Nilsen, 2020). Change readiness facilitates organizational change and reduces resistance to ad hoc solutions. It mirrors beliefs, feelings, and intentions with respect to the needed changes alongside the perceptions of individual and organizational capacity to successfully execute those changes. Employee change readiness is, hence, the all-embracing attitude that is contingent on the content, process, context, and the characteristics of the employee, such as change efficacy (Mangundjaya, 2011). The theoretical basis for change readiness is based on "creating readiness". In other words, it focuses on preparing employees for organizational change (Weiner, 2009). Change readiness has three main interrelated dimensions, cognitive, emotional, and intentional. Cognitive change readiness refers to how people think about the change. However, the emotional dimension represents the affective element and reactions. Finally, the intentional aspect deals with how much employees are willing to invest energy in implementing change(Oreg, 2003). The change readiness models highlight both the need to create awareness about the change and the necessity of supporting people's perceived ability to change.

Employee engagement, on the other hand, a positive psychological state opposes burnout (Shimazu et al., 2010). Kahn (1990) was one of the pioneers, if not the father of Employee engagement (Kular et al., 2008); he termed it as "the harnessing of organizational members' selves to their work roles" (p. 694). It alludes to the level of attention and absorption while performing work tasks. Some argued that Employee

engagement shares the core of "organizational commitment" and organizational citizenship. In their book "The Drivers of Employee Engagement" Robinson et al. (2004) construed employee engagement as 'one step up from commitment.' In more recent years, Professor Wilmar Schaufeli of Utrecht University in the Netherlands is the leading researcher on Employee engagement. Other lead researchers include Professor dr. Arnold B. Bakker; Professor of Work and Organizational Psychology at Erasmus University Rotterdam and Dr. Marisa Salanova from Universitat Jaume I in Spain. They have a distinguished portfolio of Employee engagement research (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Schaufeli et al., 2006; Schaufeli et al., 2009; Seppälä et al., 2009; Shimazu et al., 2010; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2014). Employee engagement has three primary characteristics: vigor, dedication, and absorption (Alzyoud et al., 2014).

Vigor is defined as high levels of energy and mental resilience regarding work experience combined with persistence under pressure. It is related to motivation and excitement at work. Dedication is associated with the extent of involvement at work and the feeling of worthiness and pride in what one does. Finally, absorption refers to being content, effortlessly focused, and happily invested in the job (Imperatori, 2017). Further, employee engagement is a predictor of various positive work outcomes (Burke & El-Kot, 2014). Research interest in employee engagement and its relation to HR practices increased dramatically in the last years (Baudler, 2011; Ho et al., 2011; Saks & Gruman, 2011; Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013; Yalabik et al. 2013; Jenkins & Delbridge, 2013; Karim & Abdul Majid, 2017). Preceding studies presuppose that employee engagement has a relationship with change readiness (Mangundjaya, 2011; Matthysen & Harris, 2018). In which change readiness is affected by employee engagement; and employee engagement generates change readiness (Matthysen & Harris, 2018).

Change efficacy is the level of self-confidence in one's capacity to perform the required change. It is a pragmatic variable for predicting performance (Vallis & Bucher, 1986), and it affects all types of change readiness (Haqq & Natsir, 2019).

In literature, work from home (WFH) research is focused on two main directions. first, discussing the costs and benefits of WFH arrangements (Gajendran & Harrison 2007; Sok et al., 2014) and second, investigating the work-family balance (Thomas & Ganster,

1995; Eng et al., 2010). The phycological aspects were researched extensively (Khan, 2021).

The Middle East (ME) has been noticeably left out of the international and cross-cultural research on businesses generally and HRM specifically until the middle of the last decade (Robertson et al., 2001). Only in 2007, the first special issue on HRM in the ME was published in The International Journal of Human Resource Management, and it was followed by another issue in 2013 (Afiouni et al., 2014). Besides, there is relatively little research regarding SMEs in the ME. We significantly know more about factors contributing to large enterprises' success, particularly the role of employees and HRM practices, than factors accounting for success (Burke & El-Kot, 2014).

Uncertainty is the theme nowadays. We do not know how long the COVID-19 crisis will last or when reverting to lockdowns will be necessary. We do not know when vaccines or treatments will be available nor how long it will take, if ever, to achieve herd immunity. Thus, WFH remains a vital part of the response to the emerging economic crisis and the ongoing health crisis.

1.2. Significance of Research

Although the existing research on the research variables has accumulated a vast body of knowledge and thereby has helped build an understanding of how these variables interact with different HR practices (Matthysen & Harris, 2018). Yet, in the literature, there is limited empirical research regarding change readiness and employee engagement in WFH settings (Matthysen & Harris, 2018). And no research combines these variables in a sudden work adjustment with change efficacy as a moderating factor; therefore, it is believed that this study will provide valuable insights for both managers and academia.

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On the other hand, the results of this study will be helpful for managers and practitioners, as it directs the focus of management to important variables that facilitate

and support sudden organizational change. It also shows what variables the management should cultivate and invest in developing.

Besides, highlighting current events and researching their consequences will provide tremendous value to all future research related to the future of work and WFH in the ME in crisis times. Also, future research directions suggest the importance of researching the effect of context on HR practices (Liu et al., 2019) which refines the interpretations of employee behavior (Gerhart, 2009). The findings of this study will be critical at various levels. Moreover, the timing of the research and studying an ongoing phenomenon is unique and offers new perspectives.

1.3. Methodology

The research model shown below will be investigated by empirical research. This study will be conducted using abductive reasoning and a convenient sampling method. The study's sample consists of Arab, white-collar, full-time, private-sector employees of SMEs in 19 countries, which are Jordan, Palestine, Egypt, Morocco, Algeria, Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, UAE, KSA, Lebanon, Syria, Sudan, Libya, Tunis, Iraq, Iran, and Turkey. The sample has no age restrictions. The sample has no age restrictions and ranges from 20 years old to 65 years old.

There was no researcher interference. The study setting is non contrived, which means no alteration were conducted in the samples' environment. The unit of analysis is employees. It is proven that employees are not passive recipients of the organizational change but rather active actors and responders to change in their environments (Choi, 2011) thus researching their change readiness, engagement and change efficacy is deemed beneficial. And the time horizon of the study is cross-sectional which means this study is a snapshot for the Arab employees during their work from home during covid-19 lockdowns. The questionnaire was distributed online as a google form link via different social media platforms. While using this technique facilitate reaching to a wider group of respondents it does not provide a response rate.

To measure change readiness, the Organizational Change Questionnaire- Climate of Change, process and readiness (OCQ-C, P, R) which was developed by Bouckenooghe et al. (2009) was used. The questionnaire had 8 items answered on a scale from 1-5 with (5-strongly agree) and (1-strongly disagree). The modified 9-item Utrecht Work

Engagement Scale (UWES), developed by Schaufeli, Bakker, and Salanova (2006), was used to measure work engagement. The UWES items are answered over a six-point scale ranging from "6- always" to "1-never". The Scale is used heavily in engagement
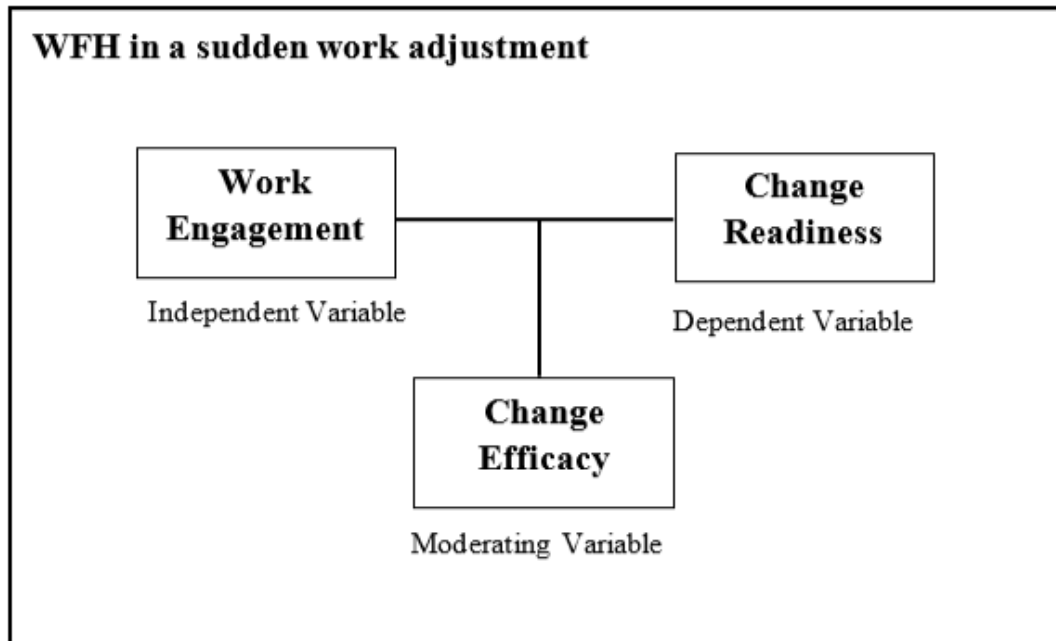
Figure 1: The proposed research model

research with an alpha reliability level of around 0.90. And change efficacy was measured by a seven item scale from Armenakiset al. (2007).

Figure 1 shows the proposed research model that attempts to study the moderating effect of change efficacy on the relationship between change readiness and work engagement during a sudden change in the workplace which is in this research switching to digital workplaces and working from as a measure to combat COVID 19.

Research Limitation

Due to the limitation of resources and accessibility, the study surveyed only 425 Arab employees from 19 countries. A larger sample would generate more accurate results. Since this study explores findings in a contemporary setting, there are limited scholarly papers and research on the topic. Moreover, this is a cross-sectional study and provides results for a specific point in time. The research variables should be studied in a longitudinal study in the future after the pandemic is declared over. With the continually

changing nature of the crisis, the uncertainty, and the changing facts lead to different results at different times.

While this study focuses on employee engagement, a focus on the organizational outcomes that employee engagement generates such as performance and productivity is essential. The sudden change and working from has many psychological effects such as anxiety, stress and fatigue that are important in accurately assessing the shift of employees' behavior (Khan, 2021). Those psychological effects were ignored in this study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter two provides the theories and the concepts that will be needed to discuss the anticipated findings of the current study. This chapter has three sections: The theoretical framework, the research variables' conceptual framework, and the research model. In the first section, the theoretical framework of this study is presented by explaining the models and theories used to construct the study hypothesis and consequently the results and conclusion. Moreover, the second section introduces the research variables, defines the concepts, and tracks how they were used in the literature. Then an explanation of the research model by highlighting the relationships between research variables is unfolded.

2.1. Theoretical Framework

This section outlines the theories that provide a basis this research, attesting how it is grounded in established studies. This section establishes the structure that guides this study and consists of four parts. It begins with a discussion about the "Human Resource Black Box" or the complex relationship between HRM processes and organizational outcomes. Then it moves to discuss the approaches of studying the content of HRM highlighting the control and the commitment approaches. Following that, an introduction about the two HRM models that are based on interdisciplinary theories, namely, the attribution model of Kelly (1973) and the HR system strength model (HRSS) of Bowen and Ostroff (2004). The final part of this section briefly discusses the theory of planned behavior which is used to explain the findings of this study.

2.1.1. The Black Box of HR

The link between HRM inputs and organizational outcomes (especially performance) has been under a lot of discussion and debate to the extent researchers termed the link a 'black box' (Boselie et al., 2005; Harney & Jordan, 2008) to imply the complexity and the existing gap in understanding the mechanism and the process behind the linkage. While there is sufficient empirical evidence that supports the existence of positive relationships between the HRM practices and organizational outcomes (Russell et al., 1985; Terpstra and Rozell, 1993; Arthur, 1994; Huselid, 1995 Youndt et al., 1996; Lewin,

2011; Katou et al., 2014), there is a lack of theory that explains the linkage between HRM inputs and organizational outputs considering all the various variables.

The gap is attributed to the lack of understanding of the roles of mediating factors that affect the link between HR practices and organizational performance (Savanevičienė & Stankeviciute, 2010). The literature addresses the link in different ways of which are the content and the process models. The content model deals with the "content" of HR (functions, practices, and policies) and proposes that the content impacts the employees' work attitudes, and consequently work behavior and organizational effectiveness. The content model is described below in detail. The process model, on the other hand, sheds light on 'perceptions'. Employees perceive the same environment differently and thus react differently to the same stimuli. To put it differently, the process model focuses on 'how' employees' perception is translated into behaviors (Katou et al., 2014).
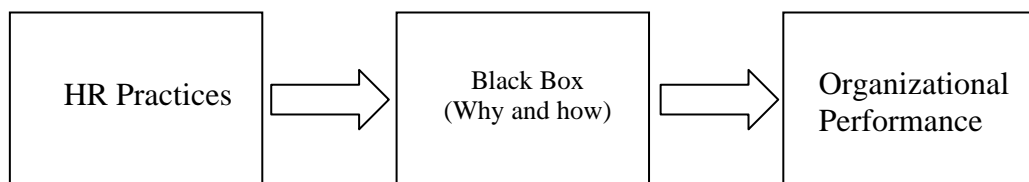
Figure 2: The black Box Explained

Figure 2 shows how the black box which lays in between HR practices and input, and the organizational performance among other organizational outcomes. The black box is to be solved by answering how and why the relationship between HRM and performance exist.

Concerning this study, both models are used to explain the research variables. Employee engagement is caused by proper HR policies and practices (Alzyoud, 2018). However, employees' change readiness is influenced by the perception of HR content (Maheshwari & Vohra, 2015) and so is changes efficacy. Lepak and Snell (2002) classified HR practices as intended, actual, and perceived. The intended HR practice is the ones planned strategically by the organization. The actual practices are implemented by HR departments, and the perceived refers to how employees perceive the practices. Whenever HR practices are mentioned in this study, it indicates the perceived HR practices.

2.1.2. Content of HRM: Control Model and Commitment Model

There are two main approaches to studying the content of HRM: The control model which is based on Taylor's work and implies that humans lack self-discipline. Moreover, its analog, the commitment model emphasizes trust as employees are capable of self-discipline and commitment (Jentink, 2011).

In this research, the commitment model is used. This model explains how employees' behavior is shaped. Evidence shows that employees commit to the organization if they are trusted and allowed to work autonomously (Jentink, 2011). In other words, employees are actively engaged and committed to their work if trust and effective communications are in place. In addition, research shows that employees' commitment positively influences the overall organizational performance (Chanda & Goyal, 2019). Committed employees are also flexible and adaptable (Jentink, 2011) which are key competencies needed for the rapidly changing business environments due to the disruptive technological and environmental changes (Federici, 2019) coupled with the unprecedented challenges the world is facing is the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.1.3. Models Based on Interdisciplinary Theories

In the HR field, there are various borrowed theories and research on issues such as cognitive processes, social information processing, individual variances, and motivation theories that have been employed to elaborate on some individual processes related to organizations and HRM practices (Wright & Haggerty, 2005). In HR literature scholars often use attribution theories to explain the link between HR practices and performance (Hewett et al., 2017). Below Kelly's covariation model is illustrated along with the HR system strength model which are used to explain the findings of this study.

2.1.3.1. Kelley's Covariation Model of Attribution

The Covariation model is based on attribution theory which was developed by Fritz Heider in his book *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations* (1958). Harold Kelley and Bernard Weiner have contributed to further develop the theory. To put it simply, the attribution theory is concerned with perceptions: of oneself (self-perception), and social surroundings, and others (social-perception) (Kelley & Michela, 1980). It holds that people shape their future behaviors and attitudes from the feedback or input they receive

from their environment and hence individuals surveil their behaviors and experiences as self-observant, and act as social observant of others' behaviors. All this to try to make an understanding of their causes and use their conclusions as an input to mold their future behavior and reactions and this regardless of the validity of what the observant came to conclude (Moskowitz, 2004).

The covariation principle, coined by Harold Kelly, on the other hand, asserts that "an effect is attributed to one of its possible causes with which, over time, it covaries" (Kelly, 1973). The Covariation Model explains how we use social perception to attribute behavior to internal or external factors. An example can illustrate the Covariation principle. Imagine that in your office a cup of coffee is being anonymously left on your desk (and not on anybody else's). They are left on some days and not others. The occurrence of it varies. Imagine, as well, that of all the people you work with, you notice that one person (Employee X) appears to be working at the office many days a week and not others. Their working days also vary. And you notice the covariation and start observing: The coffee seems to be left on your desk on the same days that the person in question shows up at the office. The variance in one event is linked to the variance in the other. Using the covariation principle, you would probably make an attribution that the cause of the effect (coffee on your desk) is manifested by the covariant (Employee X's attendance). Realizing the covariance between two events will establish a link between them but it does not explain the evidence behind the events (Moskowitz, 2004).

Kelly developed the ANOVA model to explain this by highlighting three dimensions of causes that people use when explaining their attributions: consensus, distinctiveness, and consistency. These three dimensions are drawn from the four causal factors and the interactions between them: persons (P), stimuli (S), times (T), and modalities of interaction with stimuli (M) (Kelley & Michela, 1980). The first dimension, Consensus, describes the convergence of other people's behaviors in a similar situation as a response to the same stimulus. The second dimension, distinctiveness, describes how the individual reacts to varying stimuli. The third dimension, consistency, indicates the stability of an individual's behavior with similar stimuli but different situations and the ability to generalize it over time. From these three dimensions, observers make attribution decisions on the individual's behavior as either internal or external (Kelley &

Michela, 1980; Moskowitz, 2004). Kelly explains that people attribute an event or behavior to a stimulus (such as HR practices) when distinctiveness, consistency, and consensus are high in tandem (Hewett et al., 2017). In addition, when all dimensions are high, they create strong situations essential to overall organizational effectiveness. (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004).

ANTECEDENTS   ATTRIBUTIONS   CONSEQUENCES

Information Beliefs Motivation → Perceived Causes → Behavior Affect Expectancy

ATTRIBUTION THEORIES   ATTRIBUTIONAL THEORIES
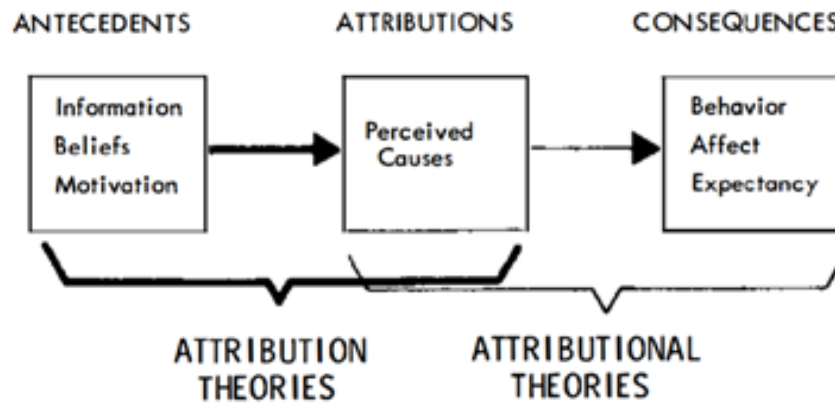
Figure 3: General Model of Attribution Field

Source: Kelley, H., & Michela, J. (1980). Attribution theory and research. Annual Review of Psychology (p. 459).

The general model of attribution field is shown in figure 3. The antecedents including information, beliefs and motivation creates the attributions via perceived causes which cause consequences like behavior, affect and expectancy.

Kelly's model is one of the attribution theory models (Heider, 1985; Weiner,1986) that have applications in HR practices. Understanding the underlying of how people attribute and explain behaviors and events is essential to many HR issues.

2.1.3.2.HR System Strength Model (HRSS)

The HRSS model by Bowen and Ostroff (2004) is a multilevel model of SHRM. HRSS assumes that the relationship between HR and organizational performance depends on the collective perceptions of employees about the types of behaviors expected of them and the resulting values, and rewards (Hewett et al. 2017). Drawing from the communication theory, the HRSS model implies that when organizations create a strong HR system, they will be able to steer the employees' behavior into intended or planned behavior. To construct nine meta-features of the HR system Bowen and Ostroff

employed Kelly's work on the covariation principle. They grouped the features into three groups: Distinctiveness, consistency, and consensus. They concluded that when they are simultaneously high, a strong HR system is in place. Distinctiveness is shown by a high level of visibility, understandability of the practices, strategic relevance, and legitimacy of authority. On the other hand, a high level of instrumentality, the validity of practices, and consistency in messages indicate consistency. Moreover, an agreement among message senders and fair practices creates consensus. These features are prerequisites for a strong HR system (Hewett et al. 2017).The model also explains how employees can individually affect the overall organizational effectiveness (Jentink, 2011) via their own accumulated attributes (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). In regard to this study, the HRSS is used to explain the collective perception of employees in terms of change efficacy to implement change successfully within the organization.

2.1.4. Theory of Planned Behavior

To explain the link between intentions and behavior, Ajzen (1985) developed the theory of planned behavior based on his earlier work with Fishbein (1980) on the theory of reasoned action. The theory is built on the assumption that intentions create the needed motivation to engage in a behavior. Intentions indicate the extent to which individuals are willing and planning to do something. This would be the case only when the individual has volitional control over their behavior. Intentions are shaped by three factors: the attitude (positive or negative) towards the behavior, the subjective norm (social pressure), and the perceived control over behavior. The theory of planned behavior suggests that perceived behavioral control and specific behavioral intention can be used directly to predict behavioral performance in specific situations as shown in figure 4.
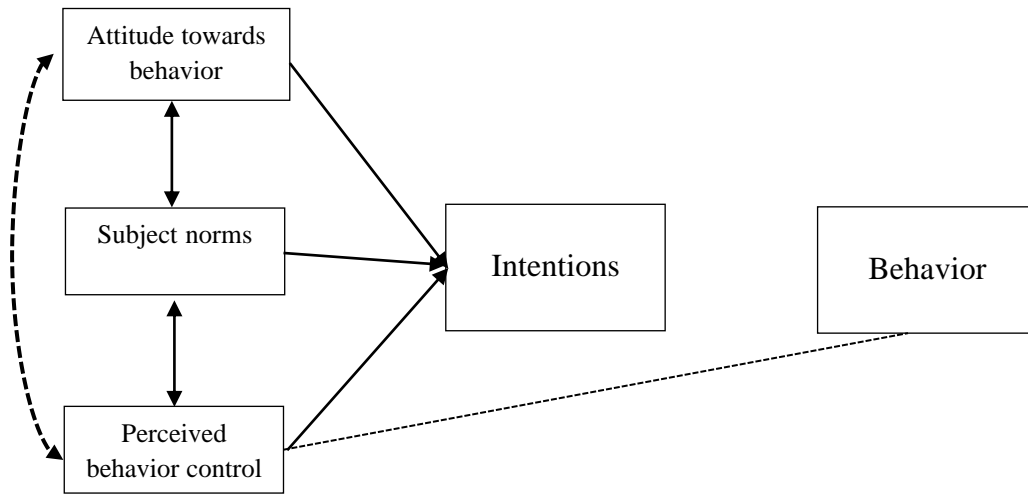
Figure 4: The Theory of Planned Behavior

Source: Ajzen, I. (1985). From intentions to actions: A Theory of Planned Behavior. In J. Kuhl & J. Beckmann (Eds.), *Action Control* (p. 182).

Figure 4 shows the relationships between the elements of the theory of planned theory. Those relationships include a relationship between attitudes and subject norms, between subject norms and perceived behavior control, and between the attitude towards behavior and perceived behavior control. The aforementioned relationships affect intentions which in turns affect the behavior. Ajzen (1991) attests that the more positive the attitude and subjective norm towards a specific behavior, the greater the perceived behavioral control, the stronger the individual's intention to do a specific behavior. This study draws on the theory of planned behavior to explain the findings of the study as this theory is concerned with behaviors in a situational context.

2.2. Conceptual Framework

This section introduces the study variables; change readiness, employee engagement and change efficacy in light of previous studies and research, and it maps out the previously found relationship between the variables and how those results are used to build the hypothesis of this study.

2.2.1. Change Readiness

For a more comprehensive understanding of change readiness, it is imperative to start with a discussion about change and organizational change. Following that the definition of change readiness is introduced along with the factors impacting it, then the change readiness programs are listed. During the past decade researchers proposed several models of change readiness and they are briefly discussed in the following sections,

then the change readiness dimensions are outlined, and the section ends with a discussion on the measurement scales of change readiness.

2.2.1.1. Change

Cambridge dictionary (2018) defines change as *"an act or process through which something becomes different."* It is a synonym for "transformation", "innovation", and "development" among others. From the definition, change is a dynamic process rather than a static action. It is the planned or unplanned movement from a current state towards a new state regardless of the positive or negative outcome.

Change management, however, as defined by Moran and Brightman (2001), is the continuous process of renovating an organization's direction, structure, and capabilities to answer the dynamic needs of stakeholders.

2.2.1.2. Organizational Change

Organizational change or organizational development is an indispensable part of organizational strategy and growth (Rieley & Clarkson, 2001; Aravopoulou, 2016). Cummings and Worley (2001) define organizational change as shifting employees from the present status quo to a future state through a complex process. Their definition indicates that change is planned and has positive objectives to attain (Bedser, 2012). However, Smith (2005), set a border definition of organizational change as the "*process of moving to a new and different state*" regardless of whether it was planned or not. If the organization starts to do things differently than it is undergoing organizational change. Aravopoulou (2016) concluded the definition of organizational change as a continuous action regarding organizational strategy, structure, business operations, and organizational members. In this study change readiness is based on Smith's (2005) definition of organizational change which is emergent: Sudden and unplanned. Research on organizational change in the 1940s and 1950s focused more on change resistance and finding ways to reduce it. In the 1980s, organizational change research trends which were led by Sashkin and Burke (1987), Woodman (1989), Pasmore and Fagans (1992) included a focus on organizational cultures, high performance high commitment work systems, the knowledge sharing in enabling change efforts.

Armenakis and Bedeian (1999) provided a thorough summary of the OC research trends in the 1990s. The general focus was on content, contextual and process issues. Moreover, affective and behavioral variables were discussed as organizational outcomes of change. The context or the organizational climate of change is determinant and formative of employees' behaviors within the organization. A flexible and supportive organizational structure and process contribute greatly to creating change readiness and reducing resistance to change within an organization (Bouckenooghe et al. 2009).

Table 1: Definitions of Organizational Change

Researcher(s)	Definition
Cummings and Worley (2001)	Shifting employees from the present status quo to a future state through a complex process.
Smith (2005)	The process of moving to a new and different state.
Choi (2011)	Organizational change happens when a situation distorts the status quo.
Aravopoulou (2016)	A continuous action regarding organizational strategy, structure, business operations, and organizational members

Table 1 summarizes the most known definitions of organizational change including the definitions of Cummings and Worley (2001), Smith, (2005), Choi, (2011) and Aravopoulou, (2016). Each definition introduces the definition from a different prespective.

2.2.1.3. Types of Organizational Change

There are several different classifications of organizational change based on different factors. Four types that are relevant to this study are discussed below. Unplanned and planned changes are categorized based on the cause of change. As to change objectives, organizational change is classified as Remedial and Developmental. However, in terms of the level of change, organizational change could be organizational-wide or sub-systematical. Concerning the intensiveness of change, radical and incremental changes (Aravopoulou, 2016) are discussed.

2.2.1.3.1. Unplanned Versus Planned Change

Unplanned change happens unexpectedly in organizations and is usually accompanied by a sense of urgency that requires the organizational members to act immediately. Unplanned change might occur due to external factors like wars, economic crisis, or as in the COVID-19 case, a pandemic or public health crisis. Unplanned change can also be attributed to internal factors like organizational restructure, public relations scandal,

financial loss, etc. On the other hand, planned changes are structured and decided by organizations in advance. It is a proactive type of change and usually, it is a part of the organization's strategic plan. Some examples of a planned change can include introducing a new system or adopting new technology, or downsizing (Brown & Osborne, 2012).

2.2.1.3.2. Remedial Versus Developmental Change

Remedial change is meant to find solutions to an urgent situation, for example, to shift for a new workplace arrangement to maintain workflow during lockdowns. Developmental Change, on the other hand, aims at the betterment of the current situation, for example, introducing a new technology to provide more flexibility for employees' work hours (Jalagat, 2016).

2.2.1.3.3. Organization-wide Versus Subsystem Change

Concerning the level of change, the organizational change could be on an organizational level as in the case of mergers which requires general changes in culture and work processes. Nevertheless, subsystem changes do not affect the whole organization and usually target a department, a product, or a service, like in introducing a new production line (Grieves, 2010).

2.2.1.3.4. Radical Versus Incremental Change

Radical changes are disruptive and head-to-toe changes, as in reengineering the organization's departments. Incremental change, on the other side, includes continuous improvement of something within the organization (Wang, 2012).

2.2.1.3.5. Lewin's Model of Change

Lewin (1951) is one of the first researchers who discussed organizational change and introduced a model of three phases of change: Unfreezing, changing, and refreezing. Lewin's model is simple and helps in building a general understanding of the change process. The initial phase of change is unfreezing the status quo to set the climate for change. This stage is characterized by identifying the need for change and communicating it to create a willingness to unlearn previous behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs to make room for new behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs. This phase would be accompanied by stress and resistance if employees are not ready for the change or if they do not have a shared vision of the new desired state (Aravopoulou, 2016). This

stage represents "Readiness to change", the willingness and capacity to support and execute change plans. (Haqq & Natsir, 2019). Communication of change is a crucial factor in creating change readiness (Goodman & Truss, 2004; Holt et al., 2007; Russ, 2008; Choi & Ruona, 2011; Haqq & Natsir, 2019) and it is essential in this stage because when the employees understand the importance and the logic behind the change they will be more motivated to contribute to the change process, in other words, employees change readiness will be high. At the unfreezing stage, the readiness message is communicated, and it should include two aspects a) the logic behind the change which explains the difference between the status quo and the future state. b) the employees' efficacy (Armenakis et al., 1993).

In the second phase, implementing the change or the movement towards the desired state. It is characterized by active learning, collaboration, and knowledge sharing across the organization. Finally, the freezing or refreezing phase in which the new norms and behavior are solidified and reinforced. This stage is important to make sure the organization won't drift back to the old state of pre-change.

Drawing on unfreezing, four different concepts were introduced to define organizational members' attitudes that are considered cognitive antecedents to change implementation (Choi, 2011). Commitment to change, Openness to change, Cynicism, and Change Readiness are all other faces of the unfreezing concept introduced by Lewin. Herscovitch and Meyer (2002) define commitment to change as the mindset that brings organizational members together to successfully carry out a needed change. Openness to change represents the positive attitudes regarding change efforts, it is the favorable views of change initiatives and readiness to implement change (Wanberg & Banas, 2000; Chawla & Kelloway, 2004). On the opposite side, organizational change cynicism is the negative and unfavorable views of the feasibility of change initiatives based on their beliefs that change agents lack efficacy and/or motivation (Reichers et al., 1997). At last, change readiness, which is discussed broadly below, includes a commitment to change and openness to change in its definition. Change Readiness occurs when organizational members see the merit of change and their ability to execute it successfully.

2.2.1.5. Definition of Change Readiness

Change readiness or readiness to change (CR) concept was first introduced in Schein and Bennis's book *"Personal and Organizational Change Through Group Methods"* (1965) they defined it as "the extent to which organizational members are psychologically and behaviorally prepared to implement organizational change." While change readiness implies preparedness it can also indicate tolerance and openness to change (Walinga, 2008). In early discussions, change readiness was discussed in the context of resistance to change and it was rarely discussed independently. Armenakis et al. (1993) were among the first to point out the difference and introduced change readiness as a tool to reduce and mitigate the risks of resistance to change. The early definitions of change readiness focused on the cognitive and affective dimensions (Haqq & Natsir, 2019).

For example (Armenakis et al., 1993, Armenakis & Harris 2002, 2009; Holt et al., 2007) define change readiness as the employees' perception of why change is needed (cognitive) and their capacity to carry out change successfully (affective). Similarly, Jones et al. (2005) define change readiness as the perspective of organizational members regarding the necessity of organizational change and the magnitude of its positive outcomes. In short, most definitions of change readiness focus on three facets:

- The positive attitude of employees regarding the change,

- The perception of efficacy i.e., the ability to implement change,

- The useful results of the change.

Nonetheless, change readiness has three main interrelated dimensions, cognitive, emotional, and intentional which are discussed below. Discussion and empirical research on change readiness were mainly initiated and published in behavioral research in health and medical journals (Choi, 2011). These researches (Morera et al., 1998; Prochaska & Velicer 1997; Taylor et al. 2004; Knight et al., 2016) spotlighted readiness in the extent of self-management and replacing unhealthy behaviors with healthier ones as in replacing unhealthy sugar-based diet with a balanced one. Weiner et al. (2008) studied 106 articles on change readiness to find that only 33% of them were in a business context while the majority 49% explored change readiness in health care organizations. Hence, research on change readiness in a managerial context is limited. Recent efforts to understand the concept and the theory behind it are led by Achilles

Armenakis and Bryan J Weiner. The latter employed the motivation and social cognitive theories to construct his theory on change readiness. He is cited more than 1400 times on the topic (Rafferty et al., 2013; Bedser, 2013; Gärtner, 2013; Amis & Aïssaoui 2013; Alzyoud et al., 2014; Fagernæs & Matsdotter 2015; Nilsen, 2020), while Armenakis and colleagues were cited more than 10 thousand times (Walinga, 2008; Weiner, 2009; Choi, 2011; Rafferty et al., 2013; Bedser, 2013; Gärtner, 2013; Amis & Aïssaoui 2013; Fagernæs & Matsdotter 2015; Haqq & Natsir, 2019). Weiner's efforts to provide a general theory and measurement tools for readiness to change. His focus was on health care organizations. In this study, Armenakis et al. 's (1993) theory and concepts are used to build the conceptual framework for change readiness. Change readiness is the comprehensive attitude that is influenced by content (the nature of change), process (how it is going to happen), context (the situation in which change is undergoing), and characteristics of involved employees (Mangundjaya, 2011), such as schange efficacy. In this study, the content that influences the employees' change readiness is the sudden change in the workplace settings. The process is the introduced WFH policies, and the deadly Covid-19 pandemic is the context that influences change readiness.

2.2.1.6. Significance of Change Readiness

Change readiness facilitates organizational change and reduces resistance to ad hoc solutions. Change readiness contributes to the effectiveness of implementing organizational change to the extent that Kotter (2007) suggested that the failure of 50% of change projects is due to management mishandling of change readiness. Change readiness is associated with proactive managers who try to prepare the employees for the change and lead them through it, as opposed to the reactive managers who try to manage and reduce resistance to change (Armenakis et al., 1993). Readiness is a cognitive precedent of behavior and it either makes employees supportive or resistant to change. Thus change readiness is used as a tool to assess employees commitment to an organizational change (Chawla & Kelloway, 2004) as high levels of change readiness indicates a high level of commitment to change (Cunningham et al., 2002; Jones et al. 2005; Meyer et al., 2007; Weeks et al. 2004) and as a counter and proactive solution for change resistance (Smith, 2005).

2.2.1.7. Antecedents to Change Readiness

There are many factors that contributes to change readiness, these factors stem from different causers. Organizations in general contributes greatly to change readiness. Similarly, there are factors stemming from the employees themselves that shape their level of change readiness. In the same vein, there are job-related factors that either increases or decreases the level of change readiness. Some of these factors are discussed below briefly below.

2.2.1.7.1. Factors stemming from the Organization

Employees' change readiness is shaped by different factors that originated from the organization. They are summarized as the following:

- Organizational capacity to adapt to change (Eby et al., 2000; Jones et al., 2005; Choi, 2011). If the organization can implement the change and provide the needed requirements and environment to implement it, this would create a level of trust in the employees that will increase their change readiness.

- Organizational policies (McNabb & Sepic, 1995), when organizational policies are supportive of change and provide the needed flexibility, employees will join the change efforts easily and faster.

- Trust in organizational leaders (Rafferty & Simons, 2006), employees do not work in a vacuum and they are unlikely to stand behind change if they feel they are the only ones who care, leaders in the organization needs to be proactive and lead the employees throughout the process (Armenakis et al., 1993).

- Work engagement which is discussed thoroughly below as a study variable.

2.2.1.7.2. Factors Stemming from Employees

Employees change readiness is also impacted by individual factors such as:

- Self-efficacy which is a study variable introduced in detail below.

- Organizational commitment (Kwahk & Kim, 2008), committed employees have higher levels of readiness to change.

- Job satisfaction (McNabb & Sepic, 1995), satisfied employees are willing to positively support and contribute to change efforts.

2.2.1.7.3. Job-related factors

Along with organizational and individual factors, change readiness is also shaped by job-related and workplace characteristics (Choi, 2011). Cunningham et al. (2002) discussed how the workplace affects readiness to change. They suggested that employees with active jobs and high decision latitude (control over their tasks) have high levels of change readiness as opposed to passive jobs where employees have no control over their tasks. Employees with active jobs are encouraged to constantly learn new things. The continuity of learning and unlearning increase the employees change readiness level.

2.2.1.8. Change Readiness Programs

Change readiness is assessed situationally. Every change situation brings new factors and variables that affect employees' change readiness. Moreover, employee change readiness is not fixed but it is a changing state of mind based on employees' experiences regarding a specific change event (Kondackci, 2013). Armenakis et al. (1993) identified four different types of change readiness programs based on a combination between urgency and readiness. The change readiness programs are: Quick response, maintenance, crisis and aggressive as summarized in figure 5.

High urgency/high readiness	**Low urgency/ high readiness**
Quick response	Maintenance
High urgency/ low readiness	**Low urgency/ low readiness**
Crisis	Aggressive

Figure 5: Types of Change Readiness Programs.

As shown in figure 5 quick response is used in high urgency with high level of readiness, maintenance on the other hand, is used when there is a low urgency but high

readiness. When there is high urgency and high readiness, crisis program is used and finally in times of low urgency and low readiness aggressive program is used. For this study, quick response and crisis programs are briefly explained due to the high urgency of the pandemic. In a quick response program, the employees are ready to implement the change in a short time (Armenakis et al., 1993). Communication and active engagement are crucial in this program. However, in crisis program employees have low change readiness and the organization has to implement change immediately. This situation calls for proactive managers who have excellent communication skills. Moreover, employees' engagement is important in this program to create and increase readiness (Matthysen & Harris, 2018) and shorten the change implementation time (Armenakis et al., 1993).

2.2.1.9. Change Readiness Types

In general, there are two directions in research on change readiness. Macro and micro. The macro direction focuses on the whole organization however, the micro direction focuses on the individuals inside the organization (Choi, 2011).

2.2.1.9.1. Organizational Change Readiness

Organizational change readiness definition uses the organizational culture, leadership, communication, and structures in its core (Torres & Preskill, 2001; Choi, 2011). In this sense, it is worth mentioning that organizational change readiness facilitates individual change (Armenakis et al., 1993).

2.2.1.9.2. Individual Change Readiness

Many researchers asserted that organizational change begins on an individual level (Porras & Robertson, 1992; Walinga, 2008; Choi, 2011) as organizational members' change readiness, positive attitude, and commitment towards change impacts their positive behavior (Meyer et al., 2007). In this sense, individual change readiness consists of the assumptions, expectations, and impressions regarding organizational change efforts (Choi, 2011).

Griffin (1987) concluded that employee change readiness change doesn't happen in a vacuum but rather it is a complementary process where the change readiness of some

employee would empower and create change readiness in other employees leading up to an organization-wide change readiness(Armenakis et al., 1993; Walinga, 2008).

Most definitions of individual change readiness (Armenakis et al., 1993; Jansen, 2000; Holt et al., 2007; Walinga, 2008; Choi, 2011) revolves around two main ideas: a) the change is needed, b) both organization and organizational members are capable of producing positive outcomes via implementing change.

2.2.1.10. Change Readiness Models

Change readiness models highlight the significance of two main things a) providing justification for the change b) embracing employees' change efficacy (Walinga, 2008). The first suggested model of change readiness was introduced by Armenakis and Bedeian (1999) in which they suggested that change readiness is a tool to reduce resistance to change and turn the affected members to change ambassadors. The model focused on change messages and introduced five factors that have to be embedded in the change messages to create change readiness: a) discrepancy, the difference between the current state and future state that justify the change. b) self-efficacy, employees believe in their ability to implement the change, c) valance, what is in it for the employees, and how the change will positively impact them. d) support, no resistance to change from the main principals who are directly impacted by the change. e) appropriateness, positive outcomes will result from implementing change.

The innovation-decision model introduced by Rogers (2003) suggests that employees' positive or negative attitudes regarding change depend on their past experiences with similar changes. In other words, Employees' change readiness shapes their behavior and affects their engagement in implementing change. Another model proposed by Walinga (2008) emphasizes a shift of power and empowering employees during a change process, empowering employees throughout a planned or an ongoing change requires helping them identify their threats and insecurities and finding ways to positively deal with the change by focusing on the problem rather than control. This model builds on the theory of stress and coping. Holt et al. (2007) presented a four-dimensional model of individual change readiness based on Armenakis and Bedeian's (1999) model. The dimensions of this model are a) change-efficacy, b) change feasibility, c) managerial support, d) change will affect the organizational individuals positively. Change is often

accompanied by fears, uncertainties, and anxiety (Win & Chotiyaputta 2018). Hall and Hord's (1987) concern-based adoption model for individual change readiness proposed that to crown change efforts with success, the concerns and feelings of organizational members regarding the change initiative should be catered to. The model recognized four stages in which employees' concerns are formed: a) awareness b) informational, c) personal and d) consequences. These concerns might include fear of maladaptation to new changes, fear of losing a job or becoming obsolete (Kondackci, 2013). If not neutralized, these concerns will result in cynicism (Reichers et al.,1997) and resistance to change (Armenakis et al., 1993). These concerns can be remedied and changed to a positive attitude towards the change process by developing change readiness.

2.2.1.11. Change Readiness Dimensions

While early research on change readiness focused on cognitive and affective dimensions (Haqq & Natsir, 2019). Bouckenooghe et al. (2009) later identified three dimensions that are used in both change readiness scales, OCQ-C, P, R, Although and the RFOC-CEI scale developed by Kondakci (2013). Cognitive readiness (C) to change is defined as employees' beliefs regarding the need and benefits of change (Oreg, 2006). While emotional readiness (E) is about how employees feel about the change, it is also about reactions. Affective variables include organizational commitment, job satisfaction, cynicism, depression, anxiety, and exhaustion (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999). Intentional readiness (I), however, change readiness is the level of energy and effort employees are willing to put into implementing change. As these dimensions represent the definition of change readiness it is essential to consider them in measuring change readiness (Kondakci, 2013).

2.2.1.12. Change Readiness Scales

In the literature, tens of tools and scales were developed to measure change readiness. For instance, Weiner et al. 's (2008) review of change readiness studied 106 articles on change readiness and identified 43 scales for measuring change readiness, of which only seven tested for reliability and validity.

The organizational Climate Measure (OCM) scale developed by Patterson et al. (2005) provides a general assessment of climate change which wouldn't help assess a specific

change event (Bouckenooghe et al., 2009). On the other hand, Holt et al. 's (2007) model Readiness for Organizational Change Measure (ROCM) was based on a selected number of organizations which puts its generalizability into question (Bouckenooghe et al., 2009). Shea et al. (2014) introduced a psychometric measure called Organizational Readiness for Implementing Change (ORIC), which was developed for change in healthcare settings. The ORIC focused on two dimensions: commitment to change and change efficacy. While it is a promising tool, it requires more testing.

On the other hand, the Organizational Change Questionnaire-Climate of Change, Processes, and Readiness (OCQ--C, P, R) scale developed by Bouckenooghe et al. has been proven valid, reliable, and practical as it could be used for studying a particular variable without the need for administering the full questionnaire (Bouckenooghe et al., 2009). Moreover, the test is convenient to respondents and easy to administer. As the climate of change (c) and Process of change (p) in the OCQ-C, P, R scale are considered precedent to change readiness (R), this study will only focus on (R). Furthermore, for this study the specific-change items of Bouckenooghe et al.'s OCQ are used which means only 2 items from the cognitive (COGRE) dimension will be taken into consideration as they are specific change-related and the other items which measure general attitudes about change will be overlooked. All items of emotional readiness (EMRE) and intentional readiness (INRE) are specific-change items thus all items are taken into consideration (Bouckenooghe et al., 2009). As a result, to measure (R) in this study, 8-items were used in a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from (1-strongly disagree) to (5-strongly agree).

In this study, change readiness is considered as an attitude towards a specific change which is the shift to working from home during a sudden change, the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, change readiness draws on the individual level, hence for measuring change readiness in this study Bouckenooghe's OCQ tool is used.

2.2.2. Employee Engagement

Employee engagement or work engagement (EE) used interchangeably in this study plays a key role in driving organizational outcomes and enabling organizations to achieve their objectives (Alzyoud et al, 2015). While researchers do not agree on the definition, antecedents, and consequences of employee engagement, they all attest to its

significance and impact on organizational performance (Yalabik, 2013). In the same vein, Employee engagement is an essential factor in enabling and implementing organizational change successfully (Matthysen, 2016). As engaged employees are motivated to use their talents to pursue challenging tasks (Burk & El-Kot, 2010). It includes both the intellectual and emotional commitment to the organization where employees are willing to put in more effort than required (Patro, 2013).

This part of the conceptual framework of the current study includes six sections. In the first section, the definition of employee engagement and early literature on the topic is presented. A brief introduction about the relationship between work engagement and burnout is provided. Following that, the significance of employee engagement is explained and followed by a discussion on the antecedents and outcomes of employee engagement. Moreover, the dimensions of employee engagement are discussed, and finally the role of employee engagement during organizational change.

2.2.2.1 Definition of Employee Engagement

Definition of employee engagement varied across the literature but can be categorized in two main approaches (Sun & Bunchapattanasakda, 2019) a) multi-faceted construct (Kahn, 1990; May et al., 2004; Saks, 2006; Bakker, 2011) b) one-facet definitions and a positive opposite to burnout (Maslach et al. 2001; Schaufeli et al., 2002;Schaufeli et al.2004). Most definitions share a focus on two main aspects of engagement: undivided attention and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2004). Other definitions focused on the level of commitment and involvement (Mone & London, 2018).

W. Kahn (1990) was one of the pioneers if not the father of employee engagement (Kular et al., 2008) he defined it as "*The harnessing of organizational members' selves to their work roles*" (p. 694). Khan went on to explain that there are three characteristics of employee engagement, physical, cognitive, and emotional and that employee engagement occurs when employees are physically involved in their tasks, cognitively attentive to their job demands, and emotionally empathic to others.

Employee engagement refers to the level of energy, commitment, attention, and absorption during performing work tasks. Thus, it is the intellectual, cognitive, and affective employee input in the organization. Some argued that employee engagement overlaps with "organizational commitment" and "organizational citizenship". Employee

engagement is a positive psychological state that opposes burnout (Maslach et al., 2001; Schaufeli et al., 2004; Shimazu et al., 2010), burnout is a negative state that results from stress-inducing factors at the workplace and it is characterized by exhaustion, cynicism, and lack of self-efficacy (Maslach et al., 2001). Conversely, employee engagement is characterized by three main aspects: Vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2004; Alzyoud et al., 2014).

In their book 'The drivers of employee engagement" Robinson et al. (2004) defined engagement as 'one step up from commitment'. They considered engagement as a "positive attitude" towards their organizations. However, Arabaci (2012) suggests that employee engagement is not an attitude but rather a level or a state of attention and absorption in the job tasks. One of the conventional definitions of employee engagement is "*The extent to which employees are motivated to contribute to organizational success, and are willing to apply discretionary effort to accomplishing tasks important to the achievement of organizational goals*" (Wiley et al., 2010). Another definition introduced by Quirke (2008) employee engagement is a strong effective link between the employee and employer that results in promoting organizational success. Quirke's definition highlights the exchangeability in the relationship between individual and organization that leads to engagement.

It is still early to have a consensus regarding employee engagement as its models and effects are still being investigated (Yalabik, 2013) However, most research focused on the impact of employee engagement on organizational outcomes including profitability and productivity, and retention (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010).

In recent years Professor, Wilmar Schaufeli of Utrecht University in the Netherlands is a leading researcher on employee engagement. Other lead researchers include Professor dr. Arnold B. Bakker; Professor of Work and Organizational Psychology at Erasmus University Rotterdam and Dr. Marisa Salanova from Universitat Jaume I in Spain. They share a distinguished portfolio of employee engagement research (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Schaufeli et al., 2006; Schaufeli et al., 2009; Seppälä et al. 2009; Shimazu et al., 2010; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2014) which lays the theoretical ground for engagement.

In Organizational behavior, literature employee engagement has been researched as an independent, dependent, and moderator variable. As an *independent variable, researchers* focused on the relationship between employee engagement and performance (Harter et al., 2002; Salanova et al., 2005, Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007). As a *dependent variable*, employee engagement antecedents were discussed as job resources and job demands. (Demerouti et al., 2001; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Mauno et al., 2007; Arabaci, 2012). Finally, as a *moderating factor,* Leiter and Harvie (1998) found that employee engagement moderated supportive supervision and confidence in management. Similarly, Mangundjaya (2014) studied employee engagement as a moderator for the relationship between change leadership and change readiness and found that employee engagement moderates change readiness.

Research interest on employee engagement and its relation to HR practices increased dramatically in the last few years (Baudler, 2011; Holt et al., 2011; Saks & Gruman, 2011; Mone et al., 2011; Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013; Yalabik et al. 2013; Jenkins and Delbridge 2013; Karim & Abdul Majid, 2017). It is also proved that employee engagement has a relationship with individual change readiness (Mangundjaya, 2011; Matthysen, 2016). In which employee engagement generates change readiness. Further, the level of employees change readiness is affected by the level of employee engagement (Matthysen & Harris, 2018).

2.2.2.2. Employee Engagement and Burnout

Burnout is a psychological reaction to workplace stressors (Maslach & Jackson, 198). burnout unfolds in three stages (Garma et al., 2007).

- *Affective exhaustion* when the employee's energy is consumed.

- *Depersonalization*, when employees stop caring about the customers and co-workers.

- *Low accomplishment* when employees' motivation and self-esteem are low.

Maslach et al. (2001) suggested that the dimensions of employee engagement: energy, involvement, and self-efficacy are the positive antithesis to burnout characteristics: exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy. While there is a lot of discussion on the negative relationship between employee engagement and burnout, it is important to state that they are independent variables in organizational behavior and the negative relationship between them is not perfect. Maslach et al. (2001) defines engagement as the positive opposite to burnout and argues that there are some aspects of work-life that can result in either engagement or burnout: consistent workload, ability to make independent choices, rewards and recognition, supportive workplace, perceived fairness, and
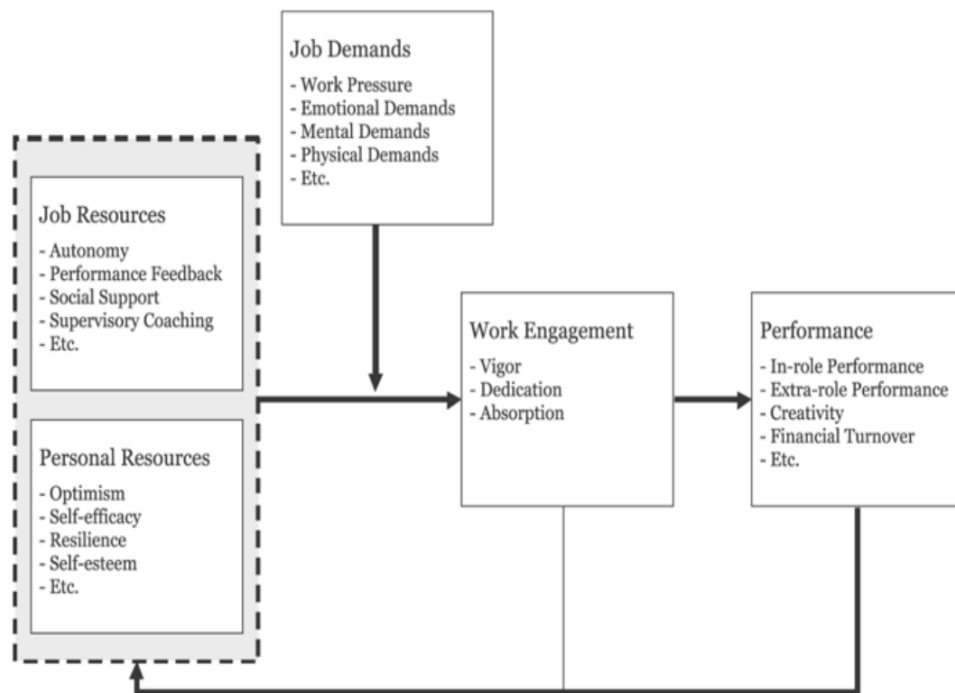
Figure 6: Job Resources- Demand Resources Model of Employee Engagement

Source: Bakker, Arnold B., & Demerouti, E. (2008). Towards a model of work engagement. Career Development International, *13*(3), 209-223.

meaningfulness.

Both employee engagement and burnout and their relationship with organizational outcomes are explained by the job demand and resources model which is presented in figure 6. In this model, job resources allude to the physical, psychological, and organizational aspects that decrease job demands and enable the attainment of organizational objectives (Demerouti et al., 2001).

2.2.2.3. Significance of Employee Engagement

Employee Engagement is one of the important metrics for the workplace (Patro, 2013) as it affects productivity and performance (Bhola, 2010). Employee engagement during the implementation of change increases their productivity (Coch & French, 1948; Armenakis et al., 1993) and makes the painful process easier and faster. Hence organizations need to keep their employees engaged before, during, and after the change (Matthysen & Harris, 2018). Employee engagement is important for the survival of businesses regardless of their size in the long run. Employee engagement positively affects the organization's culture (Piersol, 2007). Employee engagement does not depend on a specific change event; it is a general state of mind and positive emotions and thoughts about work (Schaufeli et al., 2006) caused by an organization's management and leadership (Piersol, 2007). Even though the name might give a connotation that Employee engagement is created by employees, it is in fact, created by organizations who create the right conditions to empower employees and engage them in the organization (Mishra et al., 2014). Employee engagement is highly affected by organizational culture (Shuck & Reio, 2014) and it influences employees' organizational behavior. Employee engagement is empowering to the whole organization as it provides agility and a competitive edge (Alberts & Hayes, 2006). Some researchers called for renaming Employee engagement as employee empowerment to emphasize the organization's role in shaping employee engagement by providing them with the tools and job resources they need to succeed (Piersol, 2007). While engaged employees are an asset to the organization, disengaged employees, who lost their sense of belonging to the organization, are a threat to productivity (Mattysen, 2016) and the likelihood of their quitting and leaving the organization (Bhola, 2010).

2.2.2.4. Antecedents and Outcomes of Employee Engagement

Researchers suggested a variety of drivers that build employee engagement, they can be categorized and summarized into three types of factors, organizational, individual, and job-related. Piersol (2007) put the responsibility of building employee engagement on the organization's leaders. The sense of support top management provides to employees drives their engagement levels. However, the resilience of the employees and their self-consciousness play a role in shaping their engagement. Moreover, the scope of work

and the workplace environment are among the job-related drivers of employee engagement. To explain employee engagement researchers are investigating the links between employee engagement and different organizational outcomes. On the other hand, the outcomes of employee engagement are discussed under two main headings: employee performance and organizational performance. Engaged employees are more satisfied (Kahn, 1990) and dedicated to the organization and consequently, they are more productive and they generate more profits for their organizations and the customers they serve are highly satisfied (Harter et al., 2002).

Few models explain the antecedents and consequences of employee engagement namely: Needs-Satisfaction framework by Kahn (1990), and the most famous model is the Job Demands-Resources model (JD-R) by Demerouti et al. (2001). This model claims that both job resources and individual resources could be used to predict engagement and burnout. For that reason, job resources and demands are considered essential drivers of engagement (Sun & Bunchapattanasakda, 2019). Job demands include work pressure, emotional demands, and life balance. While job resources include workmate support, team cohesion, harmony, autonomy, coaching, and management support. There is a negative relationship between job demands and job resources, the higher the resources the lower the demands are, the higher the engagement, the lower the exhaustion or the higher the vigor; and the lower the cynicism (or the lower the absorption) and consequently the higher the performance. While the original model was built around burnout the authors (Bakker et al. 2008) introduced an updated model of JD-R with a focus on employee engagement. In this model personal resources were added as an antecedent of employee engagement. They take in self-efficacy, self-esteem, resilience

Saks (2006) introduced another model of antecedents and consequences of employee engagement based on the social exchange theory which proposes that behavior is a result of a process of exchange. The model is presented in figure 7. As employee engagement is a two-way exchange between employee and employer. Masterson et al. (2000) and Saks (2006); build their definition of employee engagement on the theory.
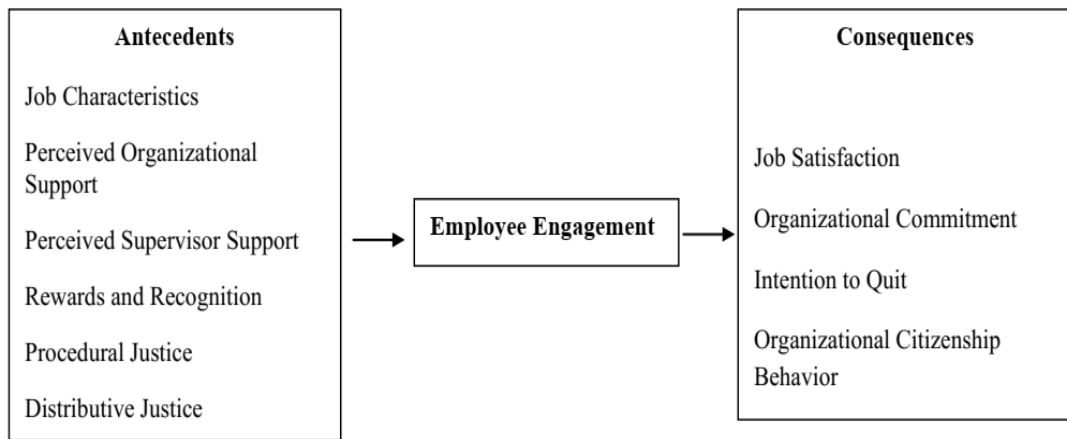
Figure 7: The antecedents and Consequences of Employee Engagement

Figure 7 shows Saks (2006) model for employee engagement. The model suggests that there are antecedents that create employee engagement and consequences that result from employee engagement. The antecedents include job characteristics, the perceived organizational and supervisor support, rewards and recognition, procedural and distributive justice. On the other hand, the positive consequences of employee engagement include job satisfaction, organizational commitment and organizational citizenship, negative consequences include intention to quit.

Job factors include task characteristics (Kahn, 1990), workplace environment (Herter et al, 2002). The organizational factors include organizational support (Harter et al, 2002), existing job resources (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Finally, individual factors include resilience (Bakker et al., 2006), self-efficacy, and self-esteem (Xanthopoulou et al., 2009; Rich et al., 2010). As for the outcomes they can be classified as organizational performance and individual performance. Organizational performance may include the organizational financial outcome (Xanthopoulou, 2009), customer satisfaction (Harter et al., 2002), and shareholders' returns (Sun & Bunchapattanasakda, 2019). On the other hand, individual performance can include employee profit (Harter et al., 2002), employee overtime (Sonnentag, 2003), employee performance (Salanova et al., 2005), organizational commitment, organizational citizenship (Saks, 2006).

2.2.2.5. Dimensions of Employee Engagement

Different researchers suggested different dimensions for employee engagement. In this study, Schaufeli et al. (2002) definition and dimensions are considered. They stated three dimensions of employee engagement: vigor, dedication, and absorption.

2.2.2.5.1. Vigor

Vigor is explicated as high levels of energy and mental resilience regarding work experience combined with persistence under pressure, it is related to motivation and excitement at work. It is viewed as antithetical to exhaustion.

2.2.2.5.1. Dedication

Dedication is related to the extent of involvement at work and the feeling of worthiness and pride in what one does. Dedication is a cognitive and affective dimension. It represents a feeling of significance and pride. Dedication is considered as the positive opposite of Cynicism.

2.2.2.5.1. Absorption

Finally, absorption refers to being content, effortlessly focused, and happily invested at the job (Imperatori, 2017). Further, it is a predictor of a variety of positive work and individual outcomes (Burke & El-Kot, 2014). Despite the fact that vigor and dedication dimensions of employee engagement are looked at as the opposites of exhaustion and cynicism dimensions of burnout respectively; absorption is not the opposite of reduced efficacy (Arabaci, 2012).

2.2.3. Change-efficacy

Change efficacy is the level of self-confidence in one's capacity to perform the required change or the perceived ability to change (Armenakis et al., 1993). It is a pragmatic variable to predicting behavioral change and performance (Vallis & Bucher, 1986) and it affects all types of change readiness (Haqq & Natsir, 2019) as it influences employees changes thoughts, emotions, and actions (Bandura, 1980; Armenakis et al., 1993). Helfrich et al. (2018) defined change efficacy as "organizational members *shared beliefs in their joint ability to engage in those courses of action necessary to implement a*

change". The self-efficacy theory is focused on the person's beliefs regarding their capability to manage their behaviors as they desire.

Change-efficacy does not only contribute to creating change readiness but it is rather a predictor of individual change readiness (Armenakis et al., 1993; Wanberg & Banas, 2000; Holt et al., 2007; Weiner, 2009; Haqq & Natsir, 2019) it is a function of employee and manager communication (Budhiraja, 2020).

Research by Helfrich et al. (2018) interestingly found out that in some settings change efficacy is irrelevant and does not impact change readiness. The authors suggested that in some settings the focus on strategy and tools would yield better results than focusing on the affective side: attitudes and motivation. They went further to suggest rethinking the concept of change readiness because they think the self-rating of change efficacy is unreliable and flawed.

Employees' change efficacy is under-researched (Fatima et al., 2020). Holt et al. 's (2007) scale for change readiness was among the first to emphasize the role of change efficacy in enhancing employee engagement in change efforts. Budhiraja (2020) suggests that employees go through three stages before developing change efficacy. a) Emotional charging, in this affective stage employees will admit the need for change and will experience intense positive feelings regarding their abilities to perform well in light of the new changes. b) Integration of thoughts, after the emotional rush the cognitive phase emerges in which employees start to evaluate and compare the experience to the current one. c) Resiliency, in which employees are flexible and ready to unlearn and relearn to support change implementation.

Even though limited, research on self-efficacy provided positive results regarding the association between readiness to change and commitment to change. Thus, it is deemed appropriate to choose self-efficacy as a moderating factor in this study.

2.2.4. Research Environment

The environment and the context of this study is unique as it studies an ongoing case of change which is working from home during covid-19 restrictions in the Middle East where limited attention to HR practices is given. This section has two subtitles: WFH during Covid-19 and HRM practices in the Middle East.

2.2.4.1 Work from Home (WFH) during COVID-19

Since March 2020, the ongoing crisis of the global pandemic COVID-19 has spotlighted many challenges when it comes to shifting the workplace settings from physical to virtual. It is evident that the world does not lack the technology nor the tools, it is a matter of gauging through them to find the right tools for the organization. Moreover, leadership support throughout the process is crucial.

Many enthusiast researchers jumped on to contribute to unboxing the challenges and tried to provide organizational leaders with a road map to implementing the changes in the most effective way. Antonio de Lucas et al. (2020) researched the evolution of remote work amid the pandemic to build a construct of how work will be re-engineered and identified five outcomes: a) The changes that happen in the workplace represent an opportunity to unfreeze the past; b) to make a room for a workplace redesign; c) by utilizing technology; d) and building an organization-wide digital strategy; and e) to enable different flexible work arrangements and a new sense of the workplace.

With the rise of the gig economy and the fragmentation of work, different work arrangements have emerged. From flexible working to work from home to part-time work. All these arrangements are still under heavy scrutiny to discover how it affects employees' performance and work-life balance. Between those different work arrangements, WFH was the most preferred by employees (Mas & Pallais, 2017).

In literature work from home (WFH) research is focused on two main directions. first, discussing the costs and benefits of WFH arrangements (Gajendran & Harrison 2007; Sok et al. 2014) and second, investigating the work-family balance (Thomas and Ganster 1995; Eng et al. 2010). Technological advancement in the communication sector enables the success of working from home arrangements as companies can monitor their workers easily and with minimum cost (White, 2019). Work from home arrangements contribute to different aspects of employees' life, for example, research by White (2019) found that WFH arrangements improve employees' well-being.

Table 2: Positive Impact of Remote Work

Impact	Research
Wellbeing	(Beauregard 2011; Edwards & Field-Hendry, 2001, 2002)
Productivity	(Bloom et al., 2013; Nakrošienèet al.2019)
Reduces work-related stress	(Wong & Cheung, 2020)
work effort	(Rupietta et al. 2017)

Table 2 summarizes the literature on the positive impact of remote work which includes enhancing the wellbeing of the employees, increasing productivity, reduces the work-related stress and supporting the work effort.

2.2.4.2. HRM Practices in The Middle East

The culture of a country impacts the relationships between research variables (Fatima et al., 2020). The Middle East has been noticeably left out of international and cross-cultural research on businesses generally and HRM specifically until the middle of the last decade (Robertson et al., 2001). Only in 2007, the first special issue on HRM in the ME appeared in The International Journal of Human Resource Management, and it was followed by another issue in 2013 (Afiouni et al., 2014). Besides, there is relatively little research regarding SMEs in the middle east. There is more knowledge regarding the determinants of large and multiorganizational success, and less knowledge about SMEs' success determinants (Burke & El-Kot, 2014).

2.3. Research Method

In this section, the research model is introduced by showing the linkage between the research variables concerning the theoretical and conceptual frameworks. The research model shown in figure 1 was investigated by empirical research. This study will be conducted using abductive reasoning and a convenient sampling method. The Sample of the study consists of white-collar, full-time, private-sector employees of SMEs in the ME with a special focus on Palestine and Jordan. The sample has no age restrictions. There is no researcher interference. The study setting is not contrived, a unit of analysis is employees because it is proven that employees are not passive recipients of the organizational change but rather active actors and responders to change in their environments (Choi, 2011). And the time horizon of the study is cross-sectional. The questionnaire was distributed online via emails and other platforms.

The modified 9-item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) which was developed by Schaufeli et al. (2006) is used to measure work engagement's three dimensions. The UWES items are answered over a six-point scale ranging from "6- always" to "1- never". The Scale is used heavily in engagement research with an alpha reliability level of around 0.90. UWES was tested across nations and deemed unbiased and could be

used to measure work engagement in different cultures (Wiese et al., 2003; Schaufeliet al., 2006). To measure the readiness for change, 8-items were adapted from the Organizational Change Questionnaire- Climate of Change, Processes, and Readiness (OCQ--C, P, R) scale developed by Bouckenooghe et al. (2009) and change efficacy will be measured by five items adapted from Armenakis et al. (2007) OCRBS tool. The minimum number of items was maintained without affecting the scale's internal consistencies, significant with Cronbach's alpha values above .70. And that is to effectively measure the research variables and assess the relationships among them because long questionnaires tend to have low response rates (Schaufeli et al., 2006).

HRM academics have already established the empirical relationships between HR practices and organizational performance and economic success. The empirical evidence set the ground for identifying HR theories and models.

Meta-theories explore the rationale of why HR practices and economic success are linked, and middle range theories focus on how HR practices and economic success are linked. Any theoretical attempt to describe how HRM drives economic success should consider micro-mediation which denotes that the linkage between any two variables can be better understood by more subprocesses (Wright & Haggerty, 2005). Wright and Haggerty (2005) also pointed to the significance of considering the time when researching HRM systems.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

This chapter of the study discusses the research methodology presented in the following sections: research objectives, research design, hypothesis, sample, procedures, research instruments, data collection, and data analysis.

3.1. Research Objectives and Research Model

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a ripple of changes in all spheres of life, with work being a major one. Millions of people around the world lost their jobs, and millions started working from home. As the world is still battling the vicious virus, it is still early to conclude how the future of work will look like.

This study has three main objectives; the first objective is to examine the employees' change readiness amid a sudden change in the work settings. The second objective is to examine the relationship between employees' change readiness and employees' engagement during a sudden change in the workplace, and the last one is to examine the role of change efficacy as a moderating factor in the relationship between the employees' change readiness and employees' engagement in the course of a sudden change in the workplace. The sudden change in the workplace, in this case, is working from home and the uncertainty of the duration of the change, as in when employees will go back to offices and how the workplace is going to be changed to adhere to social distancing practices in SMEs in particular. The following questions are dressed to attain these objectives:

1. What is the relationship between change readiness and employee engagement in SMEs in the Middle East during an unplanned work settings adjustment?

2. How does change-efficacy moderate the relationship presented in the first research question?

As per the sub-objectives of this study, they are described as following.

1. To assess the change readiness among employees in SMEs in the Middle East throughout a drastic unplanned adjustment in work settings.

2. To evaluate change readiness dimensions and how they differ among demographics.

3. To research the effect of life-threatening pandemics on employee engagement.

4. To find out how efficacy affects the relationship between change readiness and employee engagement.

This study aims at analyzing the statistical relationship between change readiness and employee engagement and the moderating effect of self-efficacy as shown in the proposed research model, figure 1, and explained in the hypothesis below through regression analysis.

H1: There is a positive relationship between change readiness and employee engagement in a WFH setting.

H2: The level of perceived change efficacy moderates the relationship between change readiness and employee engagement.

There are two hypotheses in the study. The first hypothesis claims that change readiness will increase employee engagement in a WFH model. This hypothesis asserts that managers who ensure Employee Engagement will increase employees' change readiness.

The second hypothesis claims that the relationship between change readiness and employee engagement will be moderated by the level of change efficacy that is influenced by both the sudden work adjustments and the COVID-19 crisis; change efficacy indicates the ability of employees to change their behavior to engage in actions to implement a process of change.

3.2. Sample

This study is quantitative and uses an abductive reasoning approach to discover new insights about a phenomenon or event (Kovács & Spens, 2005). The study's sample consisted of white-collar, full-time employees of SMEs in the Middle East, focusing on Palestine, Jordan, Egypt, and Turkey. The study setting is not contrived.

When the unit of analysis is the firm there is an assumption of uniformity of employees' reactions to HR practices, while such assumption might be necessary for some research, this study focuses on the employees as a unit of analysis in an attempt to investigate their perceptions and reactions to certain HR practices as it is proven that employees are not passive recipients of the organizational change. Instead, they are active actors and

responders to change in their environments (Choi 2011). Employees perceive and process information differently eliciting affective, cognitive, or behavioral reactions. Furthermore, the study's time horizon is cross-sectional. Moreover, the questionnaire was distributed online via emails and other platforms.

3.3. Research Instruments

Within the scope of this research, a survey consisting of five sections is applied. This survey consists of 34 items. The first section collected demographic data with eight items. The second section has nine items to evaluate employee engagement by using the Utrecht Work Engagement shortened Scale. Moreover, the fourth section evaluates change readiness using a 13-item scale, and the last section examines change efficacy with five items.

3.3.1. Measurement of Change Readiness

To assess the change readiness, the Organizational Change Questionnaire- Climate of Change, process and readiness (OCQ-C, P, R) which was developed by Bouckenooghe et al. (2009) was adapted to this study. The questionnaire was also used by Matthysen (2016) to measure the cognitive, emotional, and intentional aspects of change readiness in an organization that is undergoing change. The scale consists of 8 items answered over a five-point scale ranging from "5-always" to "1-never". According to Bouckenooghe et al. (2009), the alpha reliability levels of the change readiness sub-constructs (Cognitive, emotional, and intentional) are .69, .70, .89 respectively.

3.3.2. Measurement of Employee Engagement

The modified 9-item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), which was developed by Schaufeli et al. (2006) was used to measure employee engagement in this study, which has three dimensions; vigor, dedication, and absorption. For example, under the vigor dimension, items like "at my work, I feel bursting with energy" can be found, however under the dedication dimension, "I am enthusiastic about my job," and under the absorption dimension, "when I am working, I forget everything else around me." The UWES items are answered over a six-point scale ranging from "6- always" to "1-never". The Scale is used in engagement research with an alpha reliability level of around 0.90.

3.3.3. Measurement of Change Efficacy

Change efficacy will be measured by five items adapted from (Armenakis et al., 2007) to assess the prevailing belief in employees' accumulated ability, skills, and expertise to implement the change in a work setting. The Alpha reliability level for these items is .76.

3.3.4. Items Related to Demographics

The survey has six questions about demographic variables. These questions are age, position in the organization, and years of experience (seniority). In addition to Gender, marital status, and education level. One more question is added to assess if the participant had a previous experience with working from home prior to COVID-19 lockdown.

3.4. Procedures

In order to check the quality, practicality, and reliability of the questionnaire before administering it to the real sample, a pilot study was conducted with 20 people. To analyze the pilot study SPSS 18.0 was used. To test if the data is suitable for factor analysis Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test was done, and reliability analysis was tested with Cronbach alpha. Results are presented in table 3 below.

Table 3: Factor and Reliability Analysis Results for the Pilot Study

Concepts	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Test (KMO)	Significance (p-value)	Cronbach α	
Change Readiness	.810	0,00	Cognitive Emotional Intentional	0.961 0.956 0.943
Employee Engagement	.879	0,00	Vigor Dedication Absorption	0 .972 0.953 0.941
Change Efficacy	.801	0,00	0.951	

The reliability of the scales is tested with Cronbach alpha reliability analysis. Change readiness dimensions: Cognitive change readiness, emotional change readiness and intentional change readiness had coronach alpha of .961, .956, and .943 respectively. Adequacy of the sample size and applicability of factor analysis is tested with Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO). The results were .810 for change readiness, .879 for employee engagement and .801 for change efficacy.

As the pilot study results show, the scales are reliable and none of the items in the survey was taken out for the main study due to the generally positive results of the SPSS analysis.

Following the positive results of the pilot test, the questionnaires were distributed to the real sample. The questionnaires were sent to participants through emails and social media platforms. The questionnaires were available in both English and Arabic to be accessible and understandable by targeted participants. The questionnaires were distributed to the employees from different sectors, during April and May of 2021.

On the cover of the questionnaire, the confidentiality of the collected data was emphasized, and it would only be used for scientific research. Employees completed their questionnaires and returned their filled questionnaires to the researcher.

3.5. Statistical Analysis

For the analysis of the survey, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 18.0 for Windows software was used. Factor analysis is used to determine the variables and dimension's structure. In factor analysis, the principal components method and rotation technique are used.

To determine the differences between groups, t-test, ANOVA, are used in analyzing the demographic variables. Correlation analysis is used to determine relationships between variables. For the mediator hypothesis testing, path analysis is used.

3.6. Findings and Analysis

This section lays out the research findings by providing the empirical research results and the results of the proposed hypothesis. It includes descriptive analysis of research demographics, hypothesis testing, and the relationship between demographic variables and research concepts: Change readiness, employee engagement and change efficacy.

3.6.1. Descriptive Analysis of Demographics

The demographics of this study are gender, age, living arrangement, education level, years of service in the current organization, position in the company, company size, and whether the respondent had previous experience working from home or not. Table 4 shows the descriptive analysis of the demographic variables.

Table 4: Summary of the Descriptive Analysis of the Demographic Variables

Demographics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Female	223	52.47%
Male	202	47.53%
Age		
20-29	223	52.47%`
30-39	95	22.35%
40-49	70	16.47%
+50	37	8.71%
Living Arrangement		
Alone or with roommates	77	18.12%
With life partner	61	14.35%
With family	287	67.53%
Education Level		
High School	36	8.47%
Undergraduate and Diploma	255	60.00%
Graduate Studies	134	31.53%
Years of service in current company		
Less or equal five years	257	60.47%
6-15 Years	91	21.41%
More than 15	77	18.12%
Position in Company		
First Line	148	34.82%
Middle Level	206	48.47%
Upper Level	71	16.71%
Company size		
Small	81	19.06%
Medium	344	80.94%
Did you work from home before?		
Yes	175	41.18%
No	250	58.03%

From the table above, it can be concluded that the percentage of female and male employees who participated in the study are almost the same with more females than males (52.47% female and 47.53% male) and most of the respondents (52.47% of the total sample) are in 20-29 age group the other half vary between the other age groups (30-39) 22.35%, (40-49) 16.47%, above 50 years old are the least group with only 8.71%. The living arrangement for most of the respondents was living with their families. 18.12% lived alone or with roommates and 14.53% of them lived with life partners. As for the education level, 60% of the sample had completed their undergraduate studies or diplomas. While 31.53% of them hold a graduate degree.

The table also shows the tenure period or the number of years of experience in the organization, the majority of the respondents have 1-5 years of experience in their organizations at 60.47%. 21.41% of the respondents have 5-15 years of experience, and

18.12% of the participants had more than 15 years of experience. 34.82% of the sample consists of first-line employees, 48.47% of the sample consists of the middle level and 16.71% of them consist of upper-level employees. Employees working in small firms constitute 19.06% of the total sample and the rest of them 80.94% are working in medium-sized companies.

The last demographic variable asked whether the respondents had a previous WFH experience, 58.03% of the sample did not have a prior WFH experience and the remaining 41.18% had a previous WFH experience before COVID-19 combating procedures. The demographic data also included the country, the respondents came from 18 different countries with the majority being from Palestine, Jordan, Turkey, and Egypt.

3.6.2. Hypotheses Testing

Before testing the hypotheses, a test was done to ensure the non-existence of a multicollinearity problem among the search variables. As it is seen in table 6 none of the dimensions were correlated to each other with a Pearson Correlation coefficient of > 0,70. Thus it was concluded that there was not a multicollinearity problem.

Moreover, table 6 below shows that there is a strong positive correlation between change readiness and the dimensions of change readiness, cognitive, emotional, and intentional readiness with Pearson correlation equaling .879, .837, and .814, respectively. The internal correlation between the dimensions is more than .50. This is per the scale used to measure change readiness developed by Bouckenooghe et al. (2009). Furthermore, the table indicates a positive significant relationship between employee engagement and its dimensions, vigor, dedication, and absorption with corresponding values of Pearson coefficient .893, .927, .921 with an internal correlation between the dimensions larger than .70. These results conform with the previous tests on the UWES-9 scale (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Furthermore, change readiness and employee engagement have a positive yet moderate relationship with a Pearson coefficient of .305. Change readiness and change efficacy have a strong positive relationship with .706 while employee engagement and change efficacy are moderately correlated at .37.

3.6.2.1. H1: There is a Positive Relationship between Change Readiness and Employee Engagement

The first hypothesis: There is a positive relationship between change readiness and employee engagement, has been tested by finding the correlation coefficients using the Pearson coefficient between change readiness and employee engagement for Arab employees who worked from home during the COVID-19 crisis in SMEs in the Middle East to see if there is a relationship between them, and table 5 shows the results of the Pearson Correlation Coefficient test. It is clear from table 5 that the correlation coefficient is equal to (0.305), and that the P-value equals to (.000), which is less than the level of significance ($\alpha \leq .05$), and this indicates the existence of a statistically significant positive moderate relationship between the change readiness and the employee engagement of the employees, meaning that the greater the degree of change readiness, the higher the level of employee engagement of the employees.

Table 5: Pearson coefficients for Employee Engagement and Change Readiness

Change Readiness		Employee Engagement		Pearson coefficient	P-value
Mean	**Std.**	**Mean**	**Std.**		
3.50	0.90	4.56	1.01	.305**	**.000**

** Correlation is statistically significant at the $\alpha \leq .05$ level of significance.

The results of the analysis indicate that the null hypothesis is refuted, and the alternative hypothesis is supported and that there is indeed a "statistically significant relationship at the level of significance ($\alpha \leq .05$) between readiness to change and employee engagement among Arab employees in SMEs who workers from home during the COVID-19 crisis in the Middle East.

Table 6: Correlation Analysis of all Dimensions of the Study

		Change Readiness	Cognitive Readiness	Emotional Readiness	Intentional Readiness	Employee Engagement	Vigor	Dedication	Absorption	Change efficacy
Change Readiness	Pearson Correlation	1								
	P-value (2-tailed)									
Cognitive readiness	Pearson Correlation	.879**	1							
	P-value (2-tailed)	.000								
Emotional readiness	Pearson Correlation	.837**	.705**	1						
	P-value (2-tailed)	.000	.000							
Intentional readiness	Pearson Correlation	.814**	.506**	.501**	1					
	P-value (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000						
Employee Engagement	Pearson Correlation	.305**	.209**	.274**	.293**	1				
	P-value (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000					
Vigor	Pearson Correlation	.303**	.228**	.303**	.250**	.893**	1			
	P-value (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000				
Dedication	Pearson Correlation	.257**	.172**	.219**	.261**	.927**	.733**	1		
	P-value (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000			
Absorption	Pearson Correlation	.272**	.170**	.227**	.292**	.921**	.706**	.816**	1	
	P-value (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000		
Change Efficacy	Pearson Correlation	.706**	.614**	.576**	.590**	.379**	.349**	.345**	.344**	1
	P-value (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

3.6.2.2. Change Efficacy Moderates the Relationship Between Change Readiness and Employee Engagement

To test this hypothesis, Path Analysis was used using the AMOS version 21. It is an added SPSS module that stands for analysis of moment structures. It is specially used for Structural Equation Modeling, path analysis, and confirmatory factor analysis. Path analysis is a form of multiple regression analysis used to investigate patterns of effect within a system of variables. It is used to examine the relationships between a dependent variable and two or more independent variables. In this study, to examine the direct and indirect effect of change efficacy as a moderating variable on change readiness and employee engagement path analysis was conducted and the results are shown in table 7 and presented in figure 7.

Table 7: Path Analysis for the Study's Second Hypothesis

Dependent Variable	Independent variable	Direct Effect		Indirect Effect		Total Effect	
		Beta	p-value	Beta	P-value	Beta	P-value
Change Readiness	Change Efficacy	1.08	0.000	-	-	1.08	0.000
Change Efficacy	Employee Engagement	0.241	0.000	-	-	.241	0.000
Change Readiness	Employee Engagement	0.083	0.244	0.80	0.000	0.883	0.244

Table 7 and figure 7 show that there is a statistically significant direct effect of change readiness in change efficacy, and this indicates that readiness for change could contribute to increasing the level of change efficacy, as it was found at a level of significance less than 0.05. Additionally, it was found that there is a statistically significant effect of change efficacy on employee engagement, and this indicates that employee engagement could contribute to increasing the level of change efficacy, as it was found at a level of significance less than 0.05. Consequently, it was found that there is no statistically significant effect of change readiness in employee engagement, and this indicates that readiness to change cannot contribute to increasing employee engagement level, as it was found that the probability value is 0.244, which is greater than the significance level 0.05.
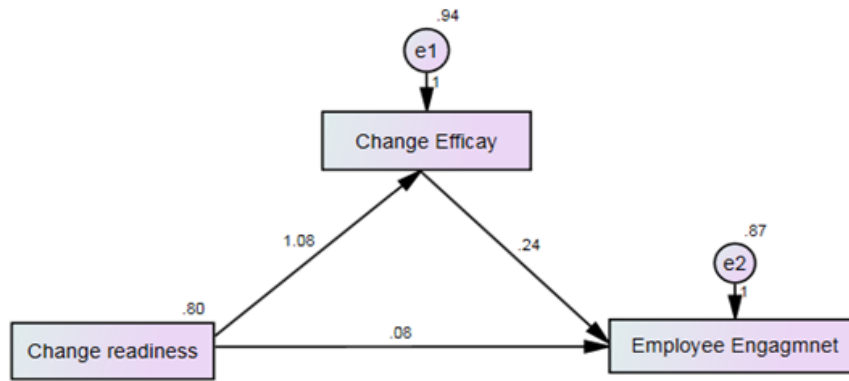
chi-square=.000
DF=0
p=\p

Figure 7: Research Model Path Analysis

After administering the moderating variable, the relationship between the independent and dependent variables disappeared and became insignificant, and the effect became complete, so the change efficacy variable is considered a complete mediator in the relationship between the change readiness and employee engagement in work from home settings during the COVID-19 crisis for Arab employees.

Table 8: Model Fit Summary

Model Fit Summary	Chi²	Sig *	GFI	CFI	NFI	IFI
	0.000	0.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000

Table 8 represents the model fit summary. the value of Chi-Square = 0.000, and the value of the Goodness of Fit Index GFI =1 which indicates a perfect fit. Moreover, the comparative fitness index CFI, the non-standard fit index NFI and the incremental fit index IFI also equal 1 which indicates that the model matched the data perfectly.

Based on the above, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted: There is a statistically significant effect at the level of significance ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) of change efficacy as a mediator in the relationship between change readiness and employee engagement at work from home during the COVID-19 crisis in the ME.

3.6.3. Relationships Between Demographic Variables and Study Concepts

T-test and one-way ANOVA Tests were conducted to investigate the differences in research variables and demographic variables. For gender, company size and previous

work from home independent T-test was used. However, for age, living arrangement, education level, years of service within the organization and position the ANOVA test was conducted.

3.6.3.1. Gender

To examine the possible significant differences between gender groups and the employees working in SMEs in the ME in terms of change readiness, employee engagement, and change efficacy independent samples t-test was conducted.

Table 9: Independent Samples T-test Results for Gender

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	T-Value	P-Value
Change Readiness	Female	223	3.441	.866	-1.443	.150
	Male	202	3.570	.926		
Employee Engagement	Female	223	4.458	.971	-2.216	.027
	Male	202	4.675	1.044		
Change Efficacy	Female	223	5.399	1.328	-.356	.722
	Male	202	5.447	1.417		

From table 9 it can be inferred that there is a significant difference (with the P-value < .05) between female and male employees in terms of employee engagement. As the mean values indicate, male's level of employee engagement was higher than the female's level of employee engagement.

3.6.3.2. Age

Age groups were investigated in terms of the levels of research variables. As it is shown in table 10, change readiness and employee engagement were found to be different according to age groups.

Table 10: One-way ANOVA Results for Age Groups

	Age group	N	Mean	F-Value	P-Value
Change Readiness	20-29	223	3.401	2.823	.039
	30-93	95	3.651		
	40-49	70	3.500		
	>50	37	3.75		
Employee Engagement	20-29	223	4.347	10.258	.000
	30-93	95	4.592		
	40-49	70	5.018		
	>50	37	4.912		
Change Efficacy	20-29	223	5.281	1.863	.117
	30-93	95	5.535		
	40-49	70	5.531		
	>50	37	5.773		

Results indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between the levels of change readiness and levels of employee engagement of the respondents who are above 50 years old.

3.6.3.3. Living Arrangement

One-way ANOVA test was performed to investigate the levels of study's variables and living arrangements of the respondents. Table 11 shows that employee engagement was different according to living arrangements.

Table 11: ANOVA Results for Living Arrangements.

	Age group	N	Mean	F-Value	P-Value
Change Readiness	Alone or with roommates	77	3.485		
	With life partner	61	3.541	.070	.933
	With family	287	3.501		
Employee Engagement	Alone or with roommates	77	4.338		
	With life partner	61	4.393	4.07	*.018*
	With family	287	4.657		
Change Efficacy	Alone or with roommates	77	5.426		
	With life partner	61	5.197	.989	.373
	With family	287	5.468		

Employees living with their families were found more engaged than employees living with life partners, alone or with roommates.

3.6.3.4. Education Level

To investigate the statistical difference between education level and change readiness employee engagement, change efficacy, one-way ANOVA test was conducted. The results are presented in table 12.

Table 12: ANOVA Results for Education Level

	Age group	N	Mean	F-Value	P-Value
Change Readiness	High School	36	3.396		
	Undergraduate	255	3.451	2.137	.119
	Graduate Studies	134	3.634		
Employee Engagement	High School	36	5.034		
	Undergraduate	255	4.479	4.923	*.008*
	Graduate Studies	134	4.590		
Change Efficacy	High School	36	5.439		
	Undergraduate	255	5.382	.288	.750
	Graduate Studies	134	5.493		

The results indicate that there is a statistically significant difference between the employee engagement levels and the education level of the respondents. Respondents

with less education seemed to be more engaged. No statistical differences were found between education levels and change readiness nor change efficacy.

3.6.3.5. Years of Service in Company

To investigate the differences between the study's variables and the respondent's number of years in their organization a one-way ANOVA test was conducted, and results are presented in table 13.

Table 13: ANOVA Results for Years of Service

	Years of service	N	Mean	F-Value	P-Value
Change Readiness	>= 5 Years	257	3.438		
	6-15 Years	91	3.582	1.858	.157
	>15 Years	77	3.633		
Employee Engagement	>= 5 Years	257	4.400		
	6-15 Years	91	4.676	10.358	*.000*
	>15 Years	77	4.963		
Change Efficacy	>= 5 Years	257	5.321		
	6-15 Years	91	5.624	1.868	.148
	> 15 Years	77	5.522		

No differences were found between change readiness and the number of years the employee spend in an organization. However, statistically significant difference between levels of employee engagement and the number of service years. The more time the employee spends in an organization the higher their engagement. Finally, no differences were found for change efficacy.

3.6.3.6. Position Level

When the participants of the research were compared according to their position levels, there was a statistically significant difference for change readiness and employee engagement levels.

Table 14: ANOVA Analysis for Employee Position Level

	Position Level	N	Mean	F-Value	P-Value
Change Readiness	First Line	148	3.367		
	Middle Level	206	3.533	3.702	*.025*
	Upper Level	71	3.706		
Employee Engagement	First Line	148	4.285		
	Middle Level	206	4.590	14.940	*.000*
	Upper Level	71	5.053		
Change Efficacy	First Line	148	5.241		
	Middle Level	206	5.464	2.638	.073
	Upper Level	71	5.676		

From table 14, it can be inferred that upper-level employees had slightly higher change readiness than first line employees and middle level employees and slightly higher employee engagement.

3.6.3.7. Company Size

To examine the possible significant differences between company size and the respondents in terms of study variables independent samples t-test was conducted.

Table 15: T-test Results for Company Size

	Size	N	Mean	Std. Dev	T-Value	P-Value
Change Readiness	Small	81	3.230	.891	-3.092	*.002*
	Medium	344	3.569	.886		
Employee Engagement	Small	81	4.309	1.050	.265	*.012*
	Medium	344	4.621	.992		
Change Efficacy	Small	81	5.094	1.471	.057	*.016*
	Medium	344	5.499	1.335		

From table 15 it can be inferred that there was a significant difference (P-value < .05) between company sizes. As the mean values indicate, medium companies had higher change readiness, employee engagement, and change efficacy than small companies.

3.6.3.8. Previous Experience of WFH

Independent samples t-test was conducted to examine the difference between the previous experience of WFH before COVID-19 for the employees working in SMEs companies in ME to study variables.

Table 16: T-test Results for Previous Experience of WFH

	Answer	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	T-Value	P-Value
Change Readiness	Yes	175	3.624	.881	2.311	*.021*
	No	250	3.421	.899		
Employee Engagement	Yes	175	4.721	.963	2.740	*.006*
	No	250	4.450	1.030		
Change Efficacy	Yes	175	5.577	1.360	1.965	*.050*
	No	250	5.313	1.368		

From table 16 it can be inferred that there is a significant difference (with the P-value < .05) between previous experience and all study variables. The mean values indicate that employees with previous experience of WFH had higher change readiness, employee engagement, and change efficacy.

3.6.4. Descriptive Analysis of Research Variables' Dimensions

This section includes descriptive analysis of the research variables' dimensions for the respondents. The items that measure each dimension are listed and the responses are analyzed. Change readiness have three dimensions: Emotional change readiness, cognitive change readiness, and intentional change readiness. While employee engagement's dimensions are vigor, dedication, and absorption. There are no dimensions for change efficacy, so the answer of each item is analyzed instead.

3.6.4.1. Change Readiness Dimensions

To the change readiness section of the (OCQ-C, P, R) scale which was developed by (Bouckenooghe et al., 2009) was used. The 8 items were answered on a scale from 1-5 with (5-strongly) and (1-agree). Change readiness dimensions were also measured. Emotional change readiness is measured by three items "I had a good feeling about working from home", "I experienced shifting to working from home positively", and "I found working from home during COVID-19 refreshing". The cognitive change readiness was measured by two items "Working from home improved performance during the COVID-19 lockdown" and "Working from home simplified work during the COVID-19 lockdown". Finally, the emotional change readiness was measured by the last three items "I devoted myself to the process of changing the work setting to work from home", "I was willing to make a significant contribution to the process of shifting to working from home", and "I was willing to put energy into the process of change to ensure the success of working from home".

The analysis of the respondents answer to each dimension is presented below in charts that show the frequency of each answer scale point. The scale points are: Strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree.

3.6.4.1.1. Emotional Change Readiness

Emotional or affective change readiness measures how employees feel about the presented change. It gives insights about different affective variables such as anxiety, depression, and organizational commitment. Three items were used to measure emotional change readiness. The analysis for each item is presented below:

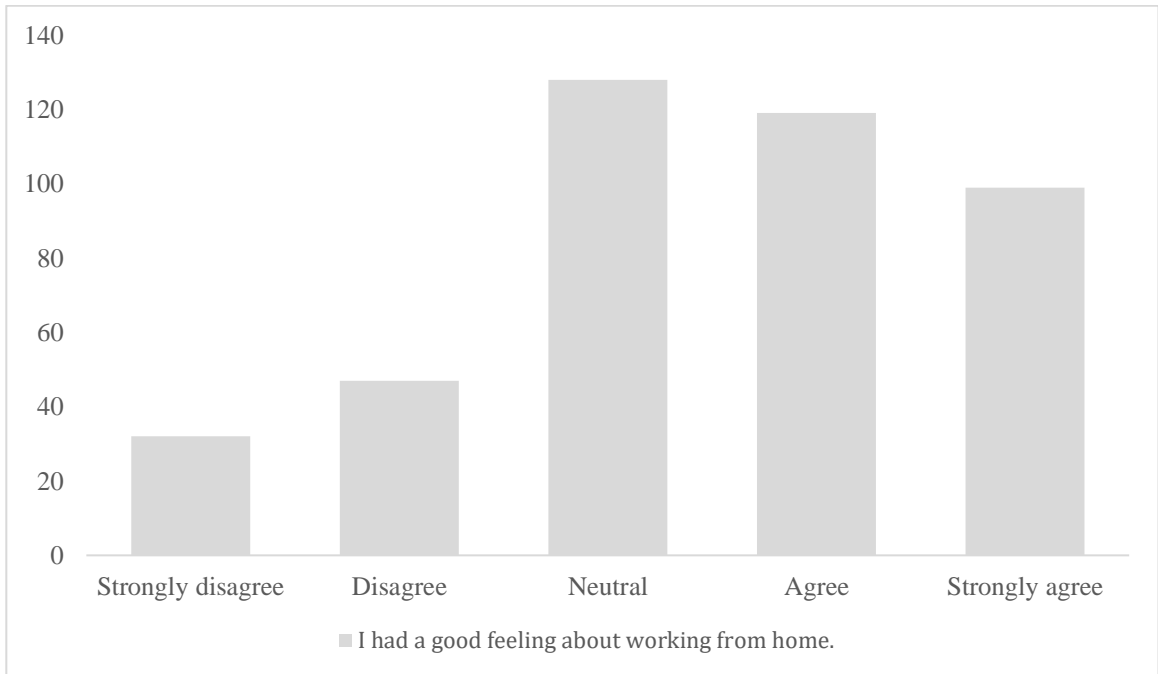1. "I had a good feeling about working from home"

Figure 8: I had a good feeling about working from home.

From the figure above the majority of this study's respondent 23% strongly agree and 28% agree that they had a good feeling about the sudden shift to working from home during the covid-19 lockdowns. 30% were undecided and answered that they neither felt good nor bad about the change. Only 8% had a strong bad feeling about the change and 11% had bad feeling about working from home during the lockdown.
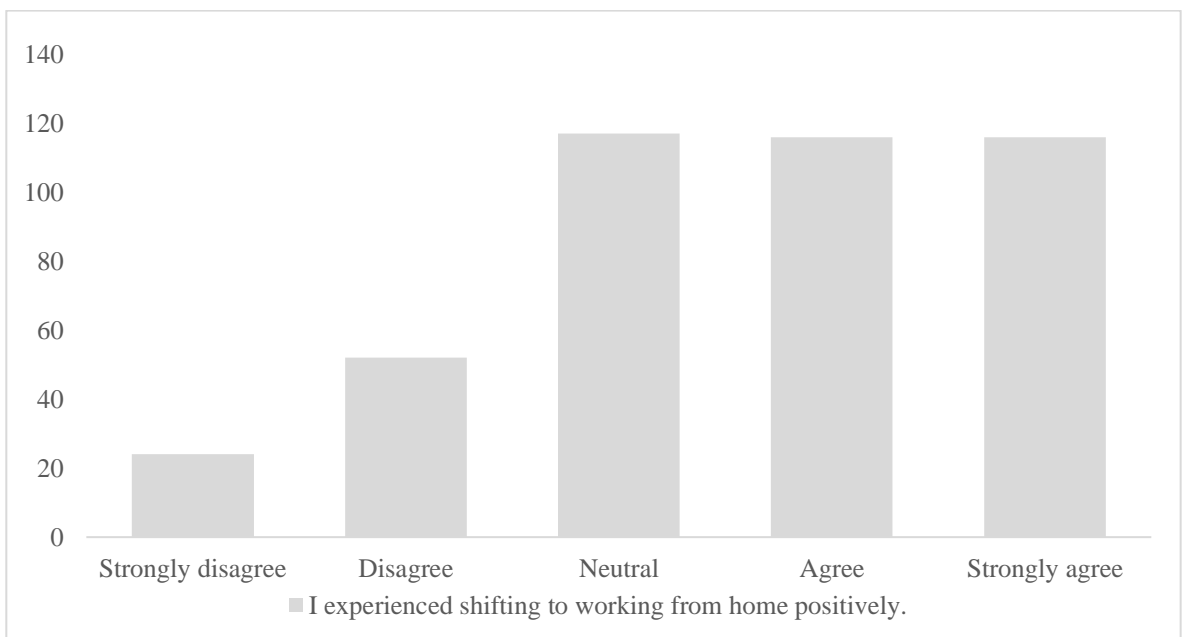
2. "I experienced shifting to working from home positively"

Figure 9: I experienced shifting to working from home positively.

Figure 9 shows that 27% strongly agree with the statement that they experienced the shift to working from home positively. Similarly, 27% of the respondents agreed to the statement. And 28% neither experienced the change positively nor negatively. Only 6% of the respondent had experienced the shift negatively strongly and 12% experienced the shift negatively.
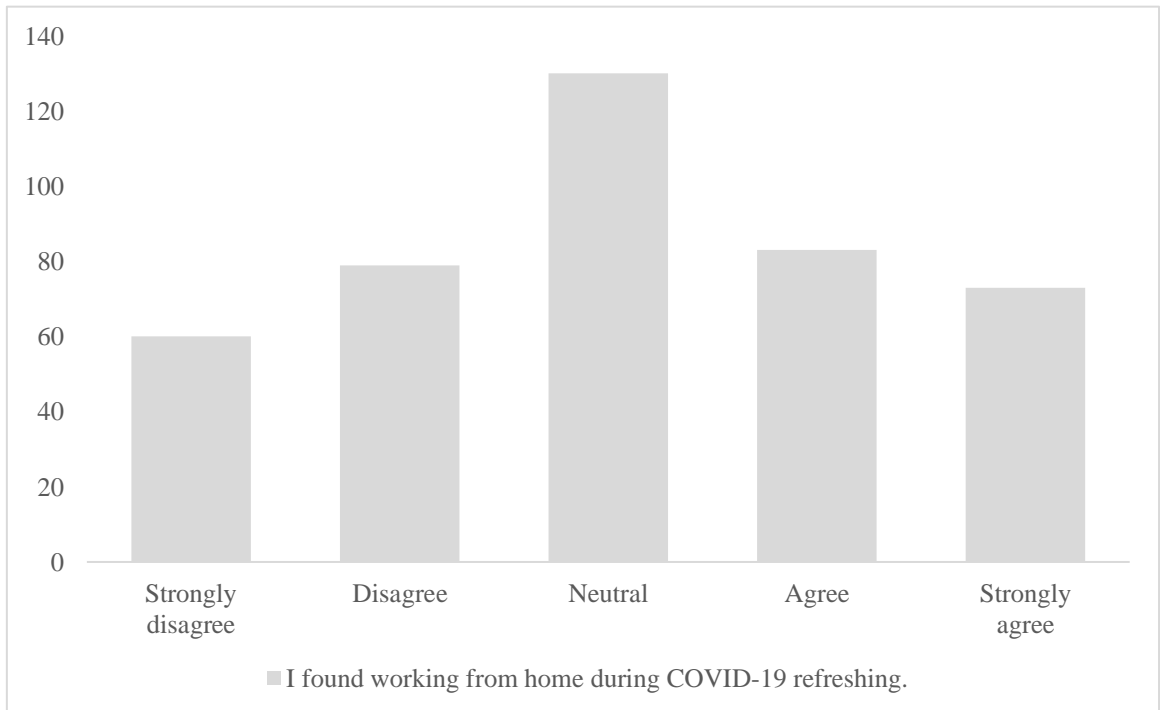
3. "I found working from home during COVID-19 refreshing"

Figure 10: I found working from home during COVID-19 refreshing.

The last item of emotional change readiness shows a normal distribution of the respondent's answers to whether they found working from home during the pandemic restrictions refreshing or not. 37% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed while 33% either disagreed or strongly disagreed. Likewise, 31% were neutral.

3.6.4.1.2. Cognitive Change Readiness

The cognitive change readiness attempts to measure how respondents think about the proposed change. In this study it was measured by two items listed and analyzed below:

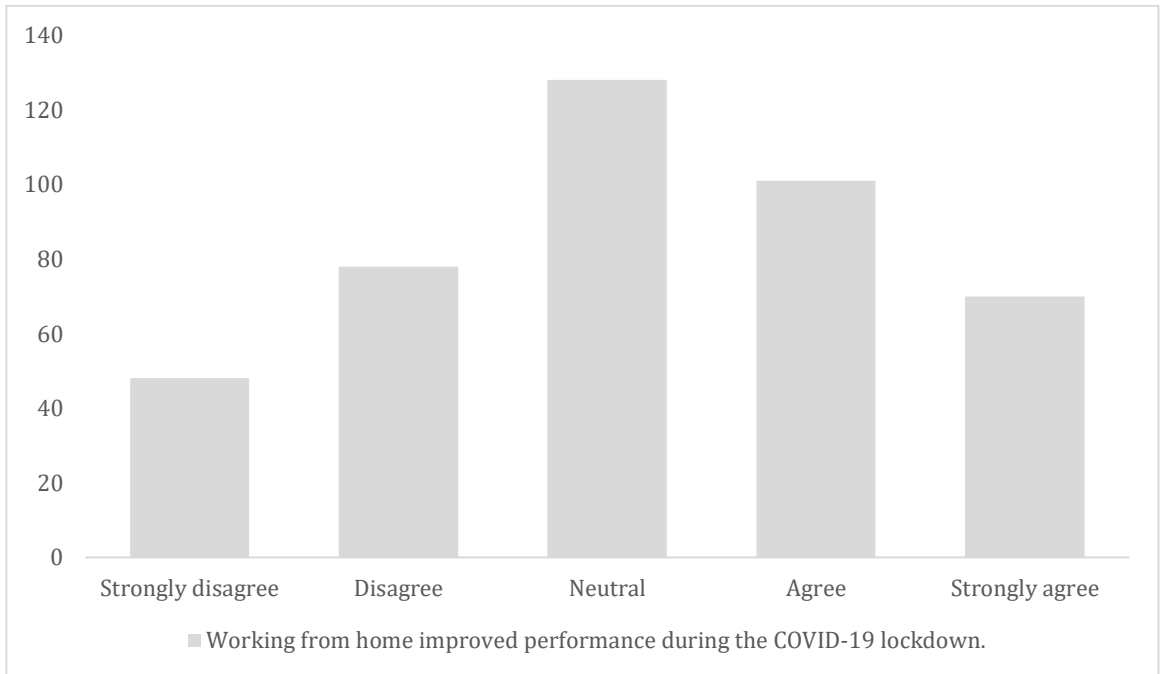1. "Working from home improved performance during the COVID-19 lockdown"

Figure 11:WFH improved performance during the COVID-19 lockdown.

The first item which measures cognitive change readiness asked about the level of agreement with the statement that working from home improved their performance during Covid-19 lockdowns. The distribution of the answers is normal skewed to the right which indicates that a higher number of respondents think working from home improved their performance.

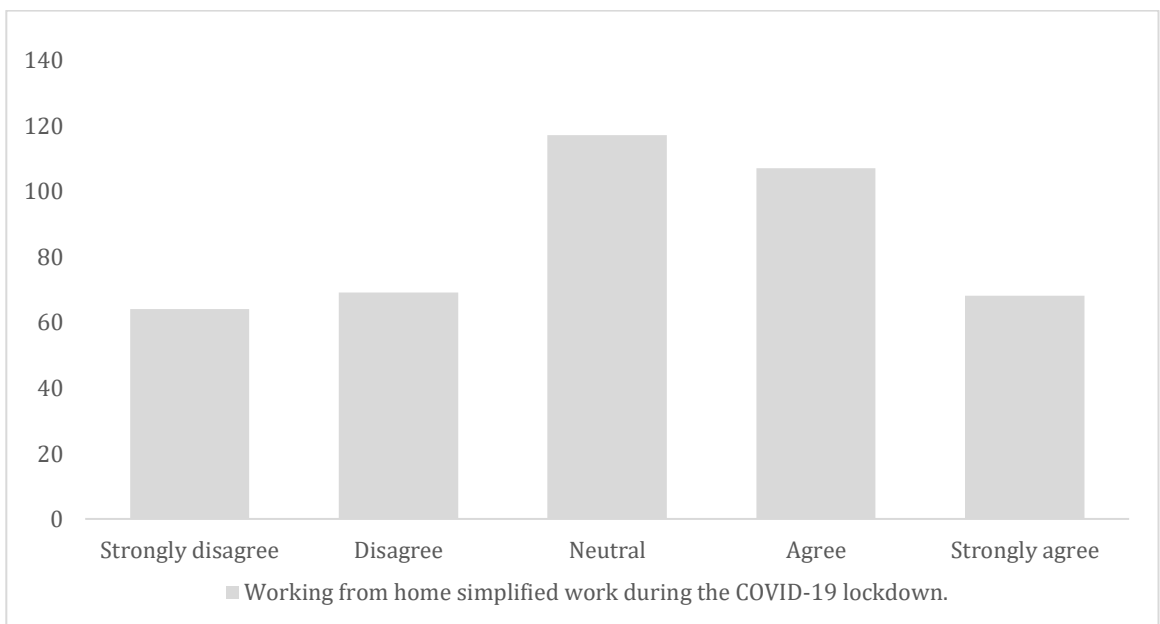2. "Working from home simplified work during the COVID-19 lockdown"

Figure 12: Working from home simplified work during the COVID-19 lockdown.

41% of the Arab employees who worked from home during the pandemic's restrictions strongly agreed and agreed that working from simplified their work. While 28% were neutral and 31% did not feel that WFH simplified their work.

3.6.4.1.3. Intentional Change Readiness

Intentional change readiness measures the level of energy and effort employees are willing to exert to implement the defined change. In this study it was measured by three items listed and analyzed below:

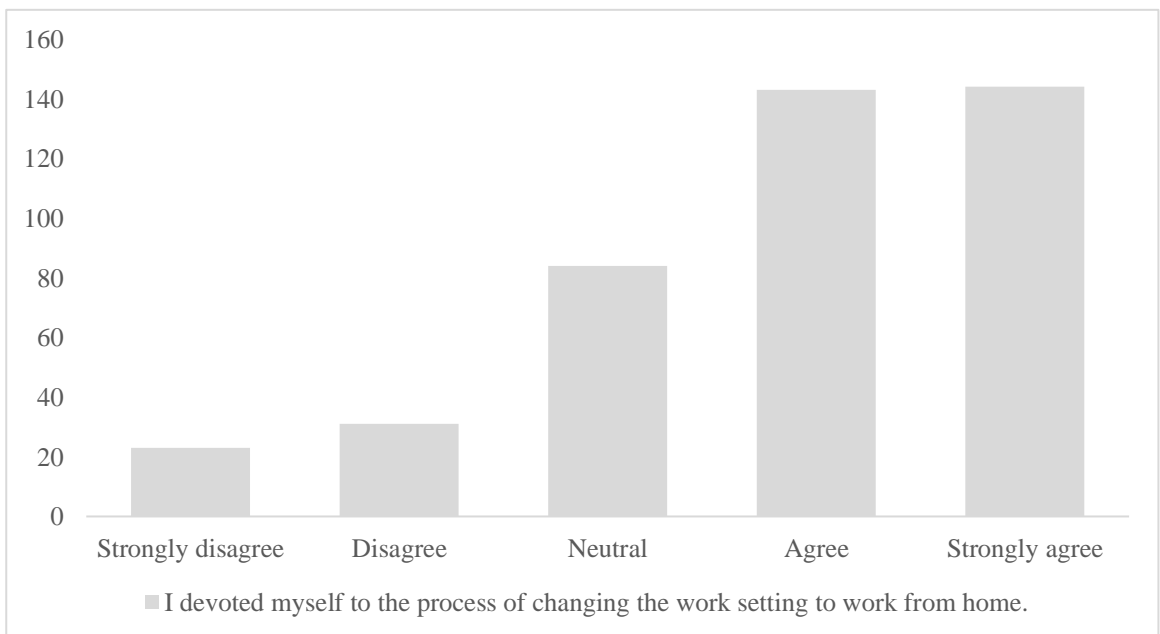1. "I devoted myself to the process of changing the work setting to work from home"

Figure 13: I devoted myself to the process of changing the work setting to WFH

From the figure above the majority of the respondents 67% agree that they devoted themselves to the success of shifting to working from during the Covid-19 lockdowns. Only 12% of the employees didn't devote themselves to the change of the work setting.

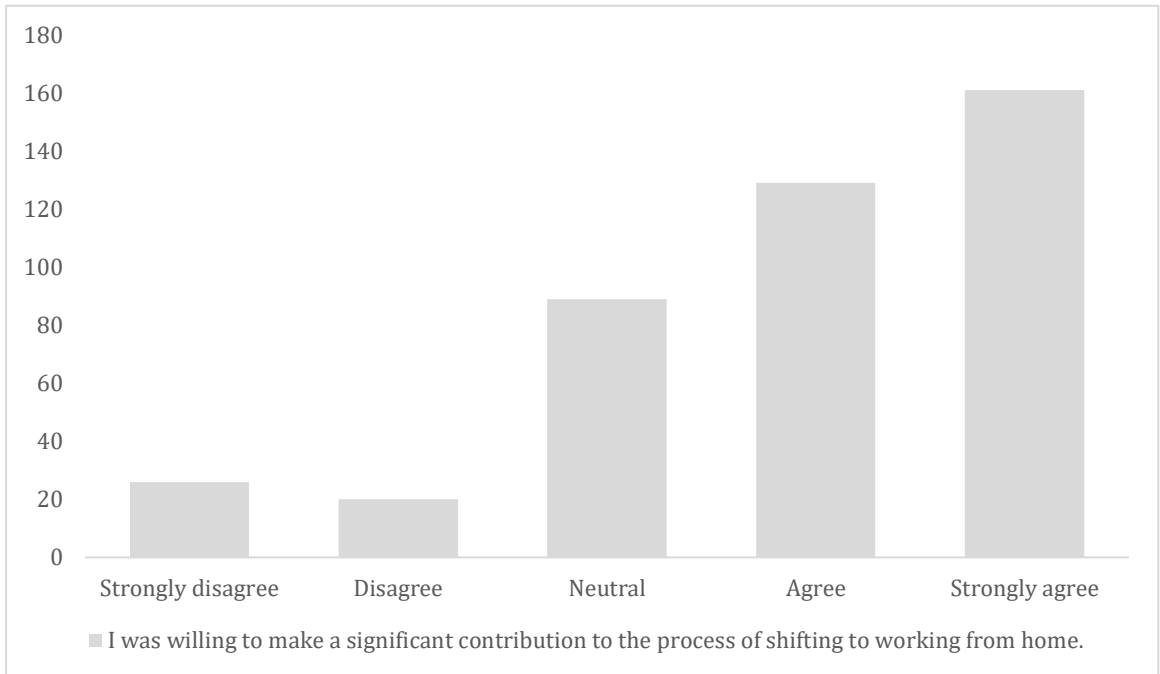2. "I was willing to make a significant contribution to the process of shifting to working from home"

Figure 14: I was willing to make a significant contribution to WFH

Figure 14 shows that 68% of the respondents were willing to make significant contribution to enable and enact the changes. Contradictory, only 10% disagreed and they were not willing to contribute to the change process. Moreover 20% of the employees didn't agree nor disagree with the statement.

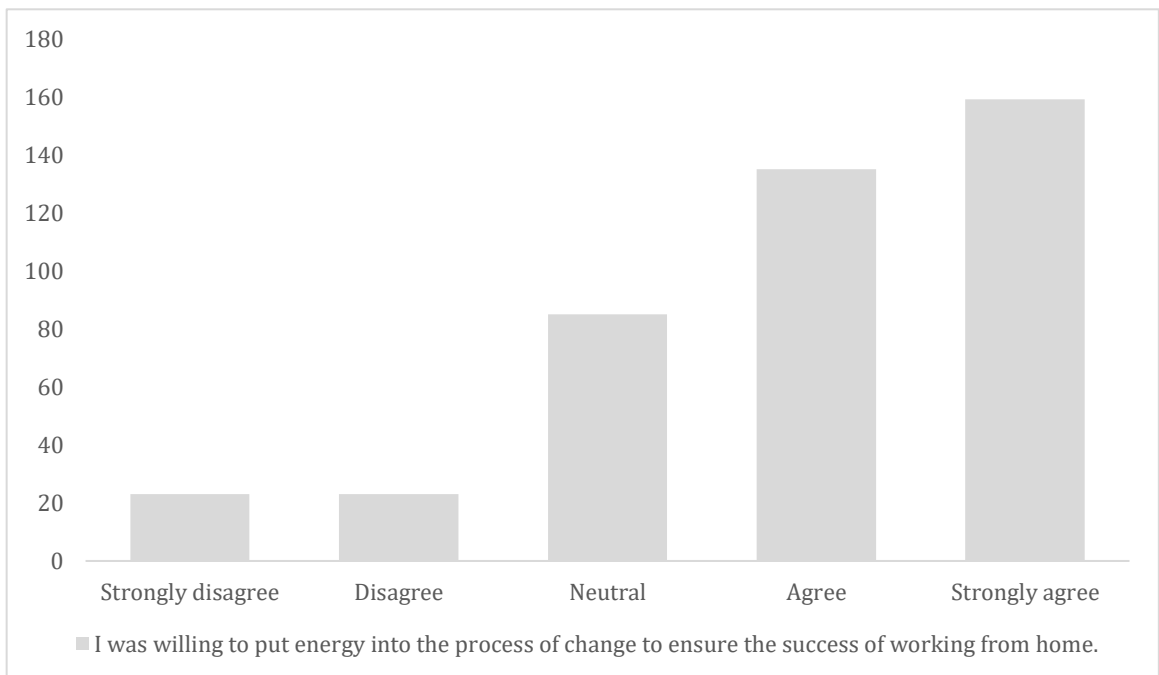3. "I was willing to put energy into the process of change to ensure the success of working from home"

Figure 15: I was willing to put energy into the process of change to ensure the success of WFH

From the first look at figure 15, it's clear that the majority of the respondents were willing to invest energy to make the shift to WFH successful. In details, 70% of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed. Only 5% of the respondents strongly disagreed and also 5% of this study's participants disagreed. Leaving 20% of the respondents neutral about their willing to exert energy to ensure the success of the change.

3.6.4.1.4. Comparison of Change Readiness Dimensions

This section provides a quick comparison of the analysis of change readiness dimensions: emotional cognitive and intentional and how they varied among the respondents of this study.
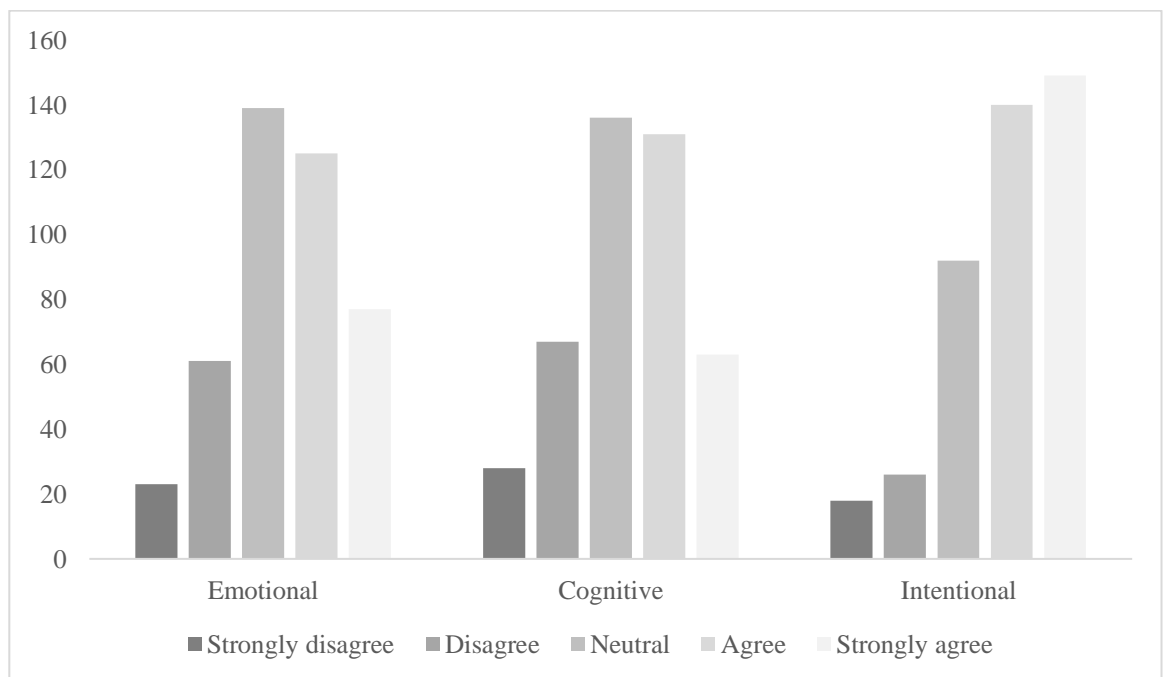
Figure 16: Comparison of Change Readiness Dimensions

From the figure above the intentional change readiness seems to be the highest among the respondents. Followed by emotional change readiness then cognitive change readiness. This mean that the respondents of this study had the intentions to positively contribute to the success of the sudden shift to remote workplaces. The respondents also felt positively about the change and that working from affected their performance positively. Finally, the level of cognitive readiness for change reflected the Arab employees' thoughts about the sudden change to working from home as a measure to combat the Covid-19 pandemic.

3.6.4.2. Employee Engagement Dimensions

Employee engagement had three dimensions: vigor, dedication, and absorption. The measurement scale used to measure employee engagement and its dimensions that was used in this study was the modified UWES scale. It had nine items; three items specified to measure each item.

To measure vigor the items that were used are: "At my work, I feel bursting with energy", "At my job, I feel strong and vigoros", and "When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work". The dedication dimension is also measured by three items which are: "I am enthusiastic about my job", "I am proud of the work that I do", and "My job inspires me". Finally, to measure absorption those items were used: "I am immersed in my work", "I get carried away when I'm working", and ""I feel happy when I am working intensely".

3.6.4.2.1. Vigor

Vigor is the level of energy and vibration as well as mental resilience regarding work. In this study it was measured and analyzed by the following items:

1. "At my work, I feel bursting with energy"
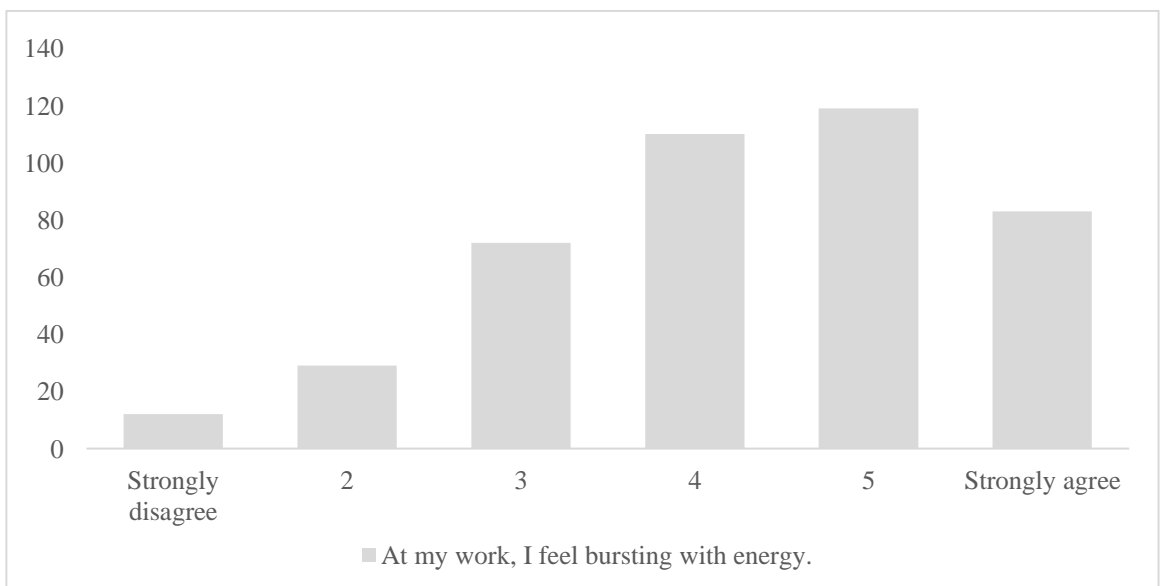

Figure 17: At my work, I feel bursting with energy

Figure 17 shows that most of the respondents felt they had a lot of energy while working from home during the pandemic's lockdowns. 73% scored 4 and above on the

(1-6) Likert scale. Only 27% scored 3 and less to express that they felt they lacked energy during the change.

2. "At my job, I feel strong and vigoros"
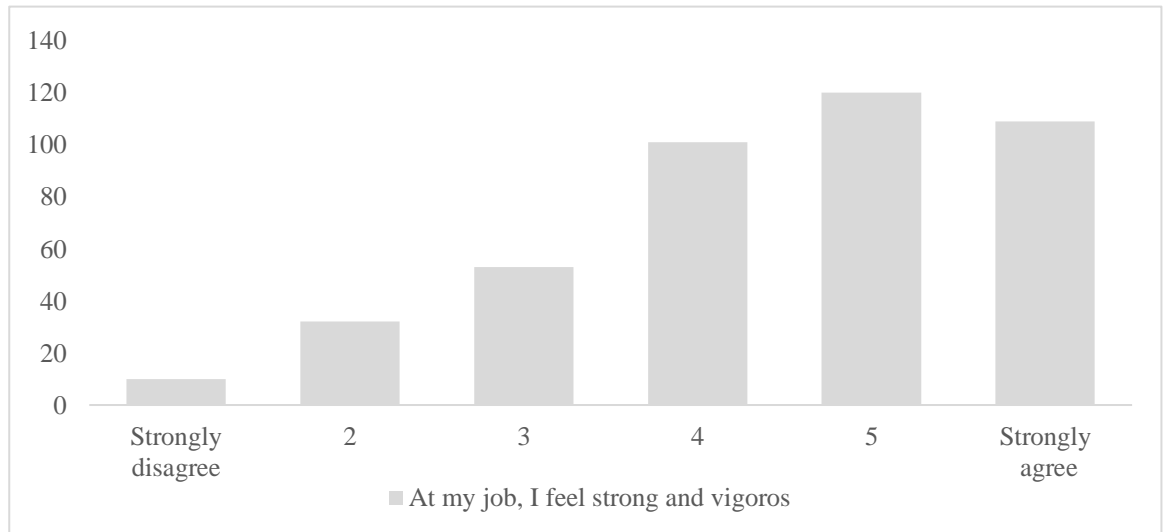
Figure 18:At my job, I feel strong and vigoros

Figure 18 shows the results for how the respondent's answered on a (1-6) Likert scale how much they felt strong and vigoros while working from home during Covid-19 restrictions. 78% answered with 4 or more agreeing that they felt strong and vigoros. While only 22% disagreed and did not feel strong and vigoros while WFH.

3. "When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work"
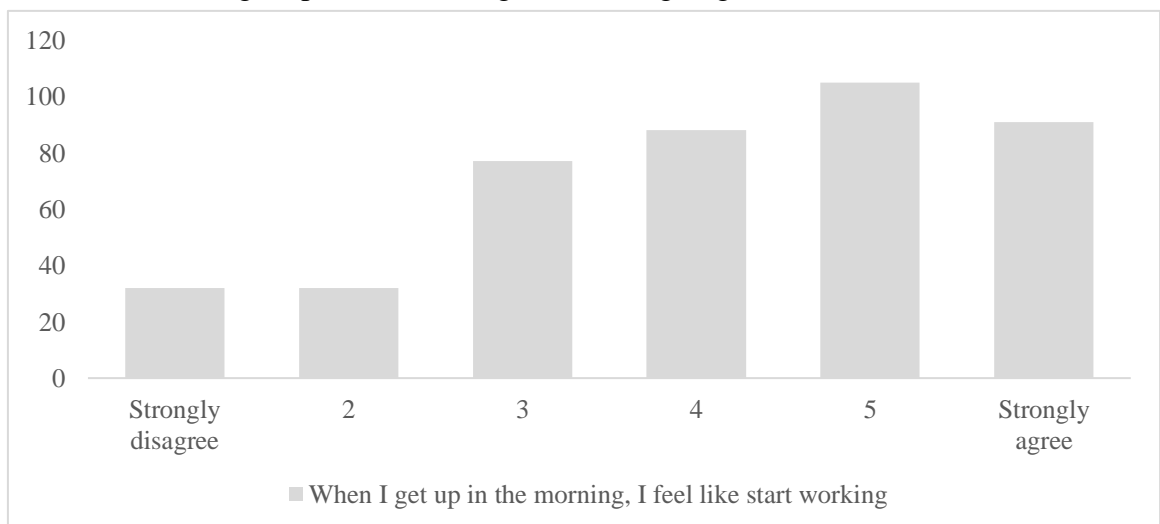
Figure 19: When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work

Figure 19 shows the results for the last item of vigor. 67% of the respondents agreed that during working from home stage they got up in the morning ready to work. Aversely, 33% disagreed and did not feel like working when they woke up.

3.6.4.2.3. Dedication

Dedication measured the level of employees' involvement at work tasks and their feelings of worthiness and pride in in their work. In this study dedication is measured by three items mentioned and analyzed below:

1. "I am enthusiastic about my job"
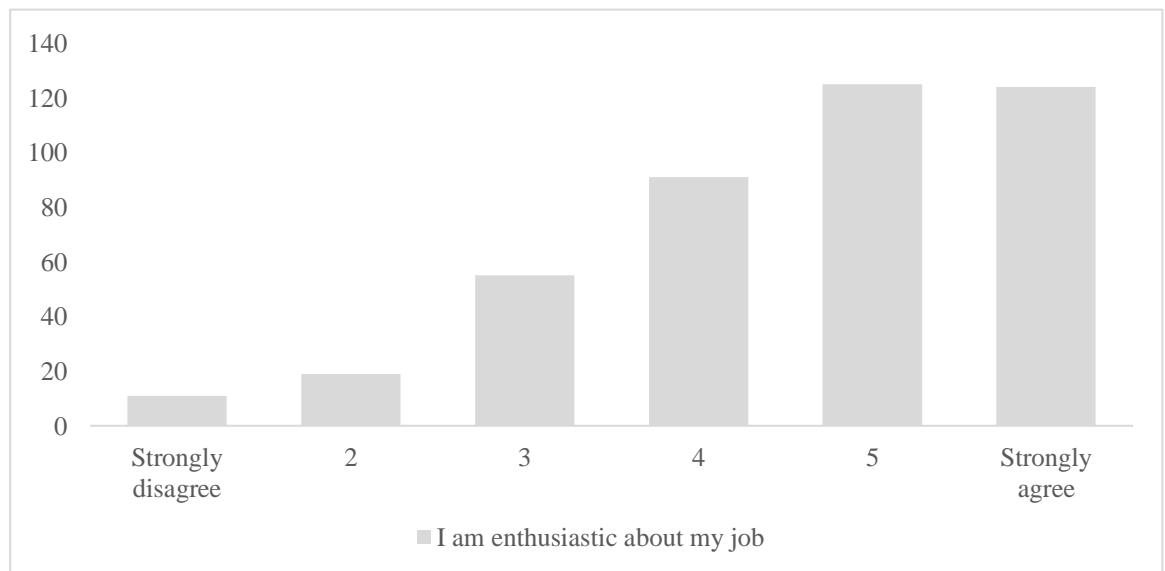
Figure 20: I am enthusiastic about my job

From the figure above, most of the respondents felt enthusiastic about their working from home experience during the covid-19 lockdowns. Only % of the respondents didn't feel enthusiastic about their work.

2. "I am proud of the work that I do"

The second item of measuring dedication asked the respondents to rate how much they felt proud about their work. From figure 21, 91% of the Arab employees who worked
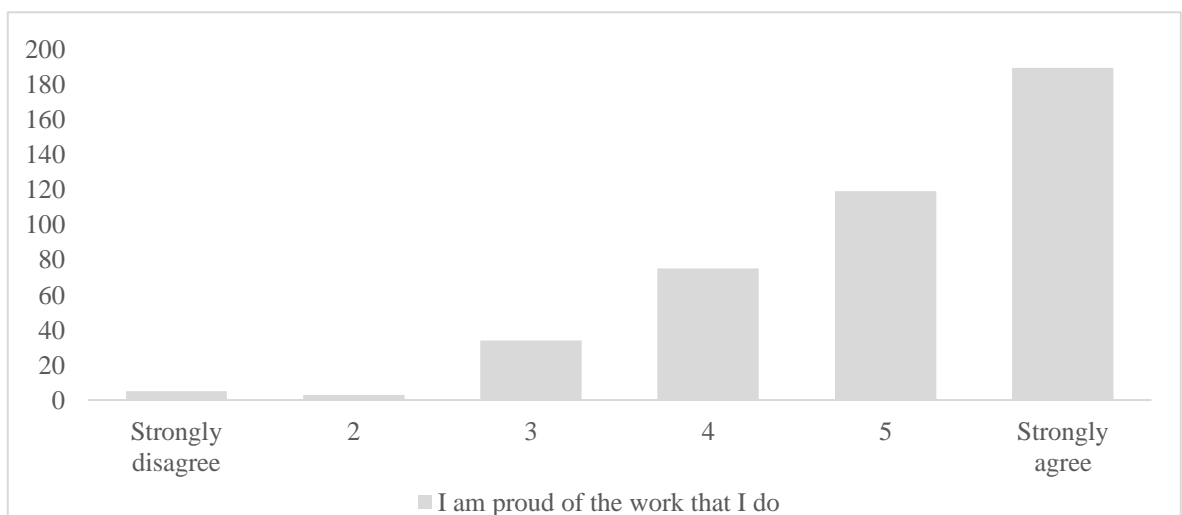
Figure 21:I am proud of the work that I do

from home during Covid-19 lockdowns felt somewhat to strongly proud about their work. While only 9% felt somehow to strongly unproud about their work.

3. "My job inspires me"
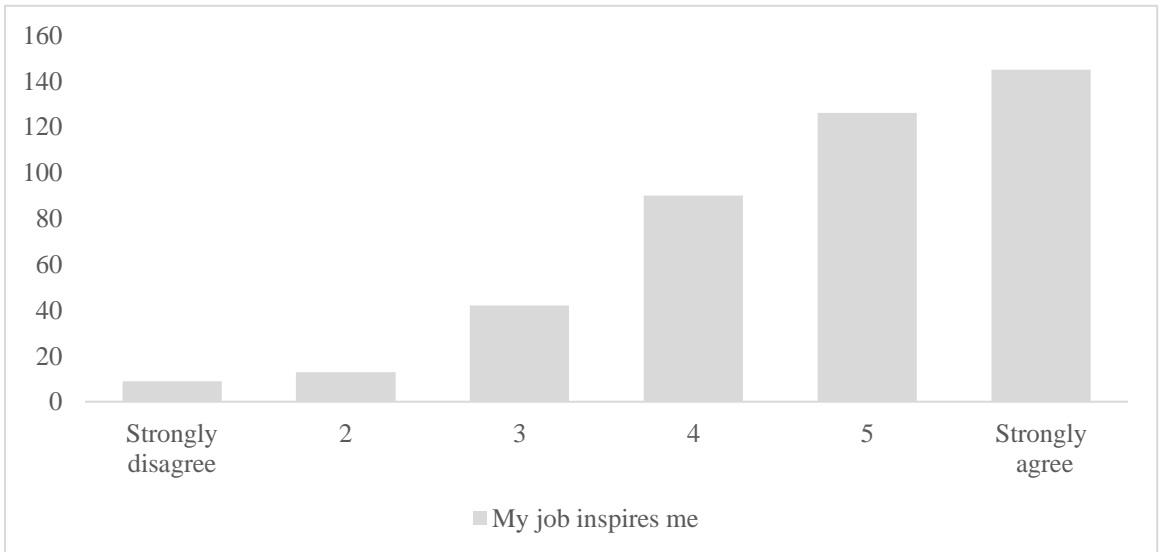
Figure 22: My job inspires me

When the study's participants were asked to rate how much their jobs inspire them on a Likert scale from 1 to 6, a sweeping 85% of the respondents felt somehow to strongly inspired by their jobs. Contrary, 15% of the respondents felt the opposite.

3.6.4.2.3. Absorption

Absorption measures how much an employee is happily swallowed by their work, how focused and invested. Absorption in this study was measured by three items they are mentioned and analyzed as following:

1. "I am immersed in my work"
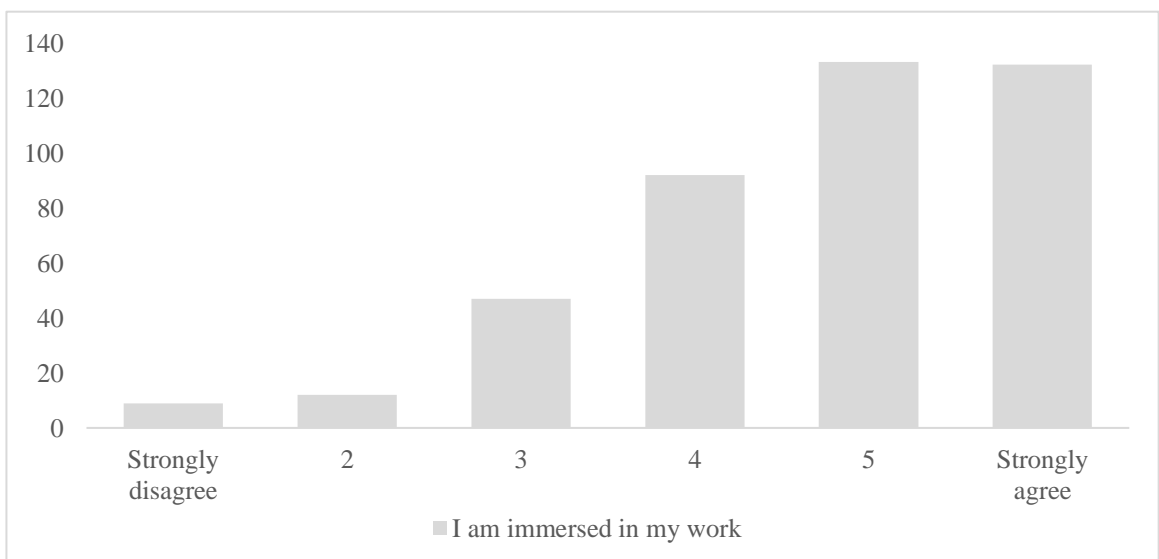
Figure 23: I am immersed in my work

From the figure above it can be attested that the majority of respondents felt immersed in their work. In numbers, 84% of the Arab employees who worked from home in SMEs during Covid-19 lockdowns said they were submerged into their work, while only 16% did not agree.

2. "I get carried away when I'm working"
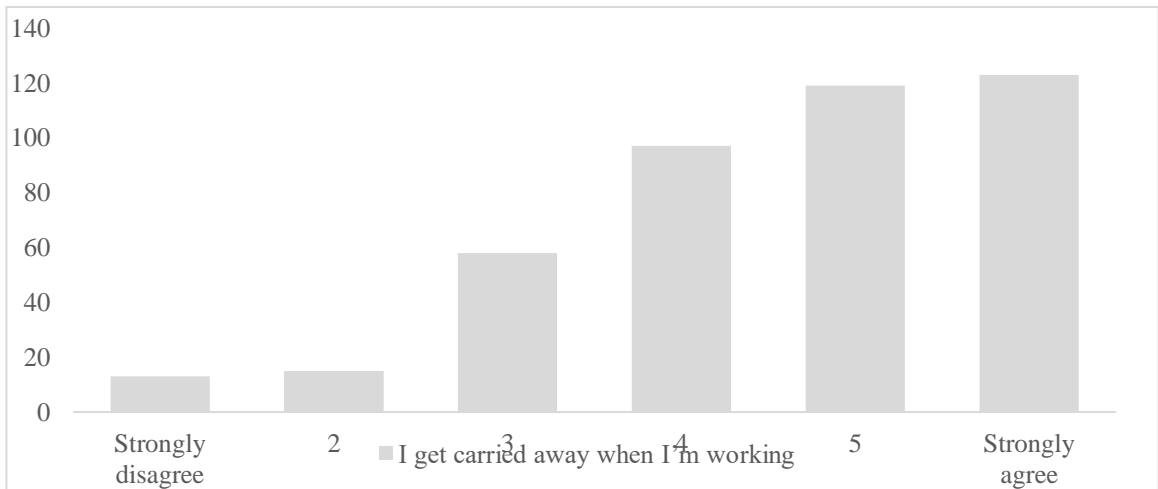
Figure 24: I get carried away when I'm working

Figure 24 shows that 80% of this study's respondents scored their excitement during their work above 3 points. 20% disagreed with the statement and didn't feel excited during their work. This indicated to a high level of absorption.

3. "I feel happy when I am working intensely"

Figure 25: I feel happy when I am working intensely

The last item measuring absorption is analyzed in the above figure. Accordingly, 78% of the respondents answered with somehow agree, agree and strongly agree to feeling happy when they work so much. 22% answered with strongly disagree, disagree, and somewhat disagree.

3.6.4.2.4. Comparison of Employee Engagement Dimensions

This section provides a comparison between the level of each dimension of employee engagement among the respondents in this study.
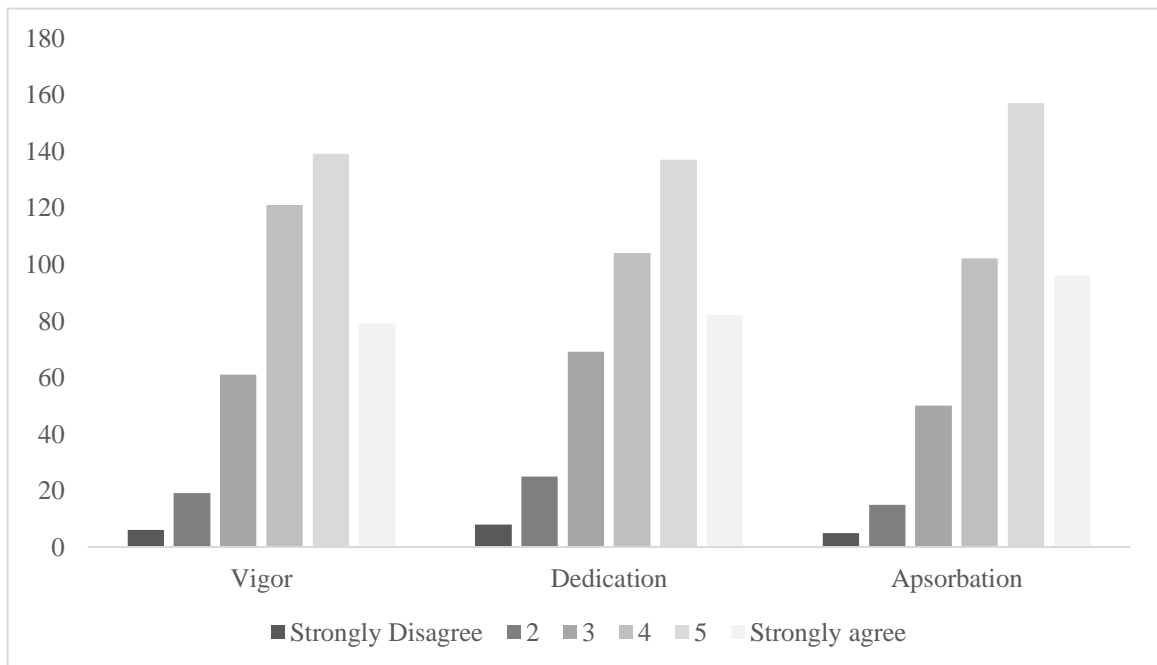
Figure 26: Comparison of Employee Engagement Dimensions

The figure above compares the average of the answers for each dimension of employee engagement. The level of absorption is the highest meaning that the respondents felt invested in their work during their work from home experience. The level of vigor and dedication follows, this means that the respondents were energized about their work, and they were dedicated and proud of their work.

3.6.4.3. Change Efficacy

Change efficacy refers to the level of self-confidence in one's capacity to perform a required change. is focused on the person's beliefs regarding their capability to manage their behaviors as they desire. To measure it an adaptation of Armenakis et al. (2007) scale was used to assess the respondents' beliefs in their ability, skills, and expertise to

implement the change in a work setting. The respondents provided answers to 5 items on a Likert scale from 1-7. With 1 is the lowest point "strongly disagree" and 7 is the highest "strongly agree"

1. "I had the capability to implement the initiated change"
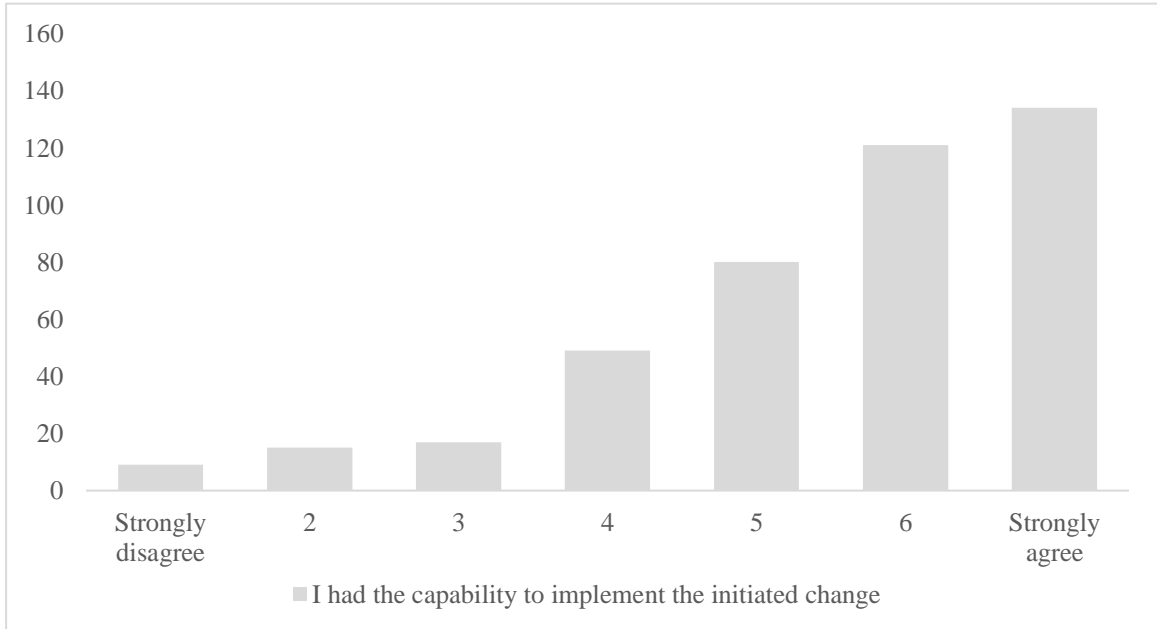
Figure 27: I had the capability to implement the initiated change

The figure above shows that the majority of respondents' answers were positive, agreeing with that they had what it talked to implement the change to working from home. Precisely, 90% of the study's respondents rated their answer with 4 or more, while only 10% answered with less than four disagreeing with the statement.

2. "I can implement this change in my job"
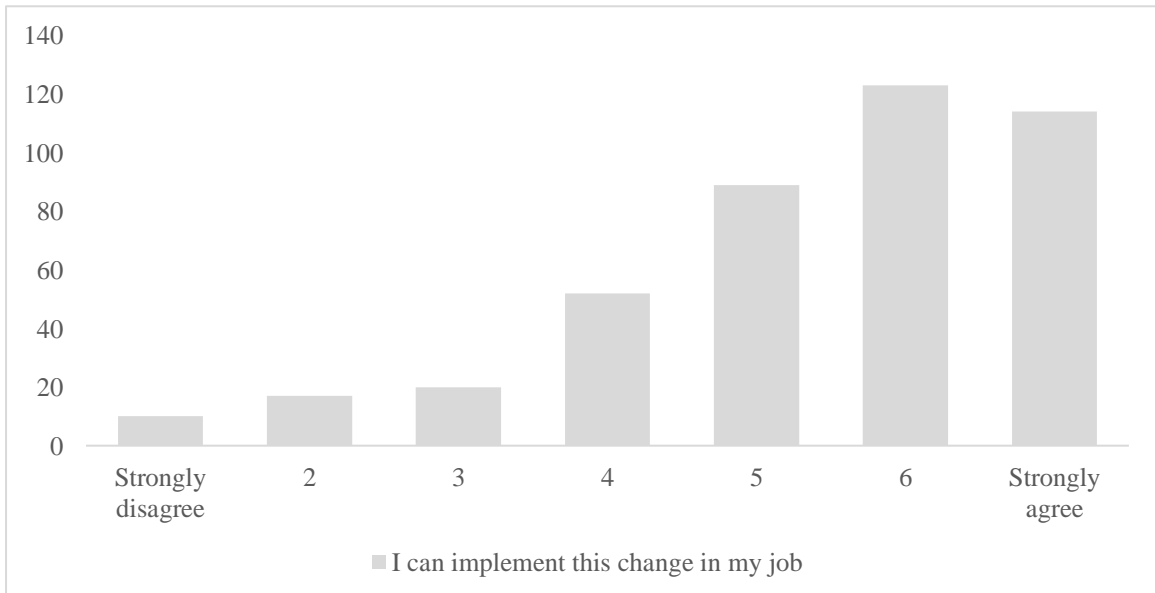
Figure 28: I can implement this change in my job

The second item of measuring change efficacy in this study's questionnaire asked the respondents to rate the statement that they can implement the change to working from home on a scale from 1-7. The results showed that 89% of the respondents' answered with 4 or more agreeing with the statement and 11% answered with less than 4 disagreeing with the statement.

3. "I am capable of successfully performing my job duties"
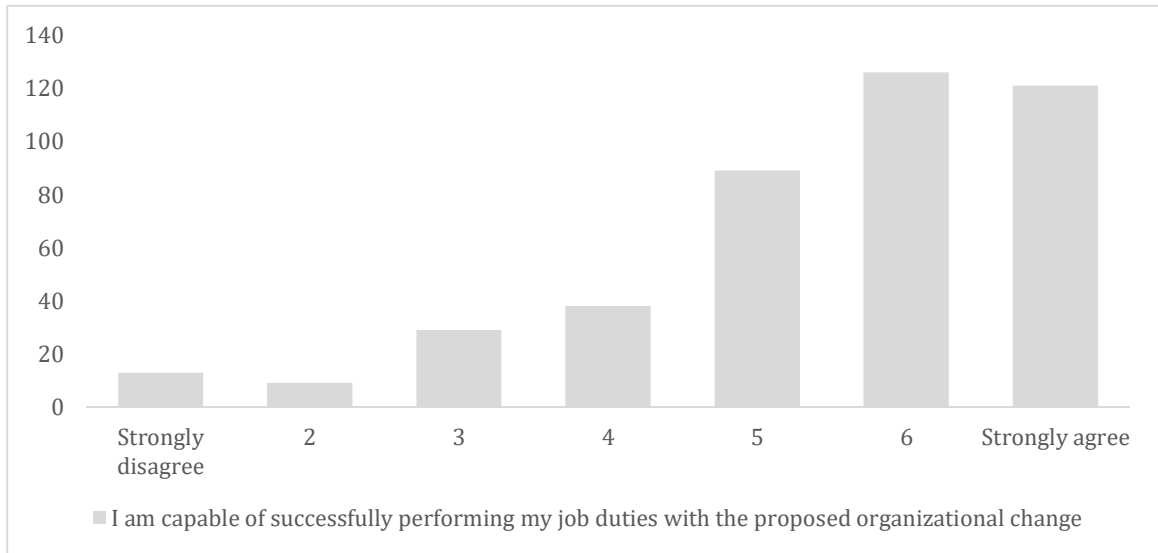
Figure 29: I am capable of successfully performing my duties

Figure 29 shows that the answers of this study's respondents to this item were positive agreeing that they are capable of performing their duties successfully during working from home. From the respondents' answers 88% agreed with a point of 4 or more and only 12% answered with less than 4 points.

4. "I believe we can successfully implement this change"
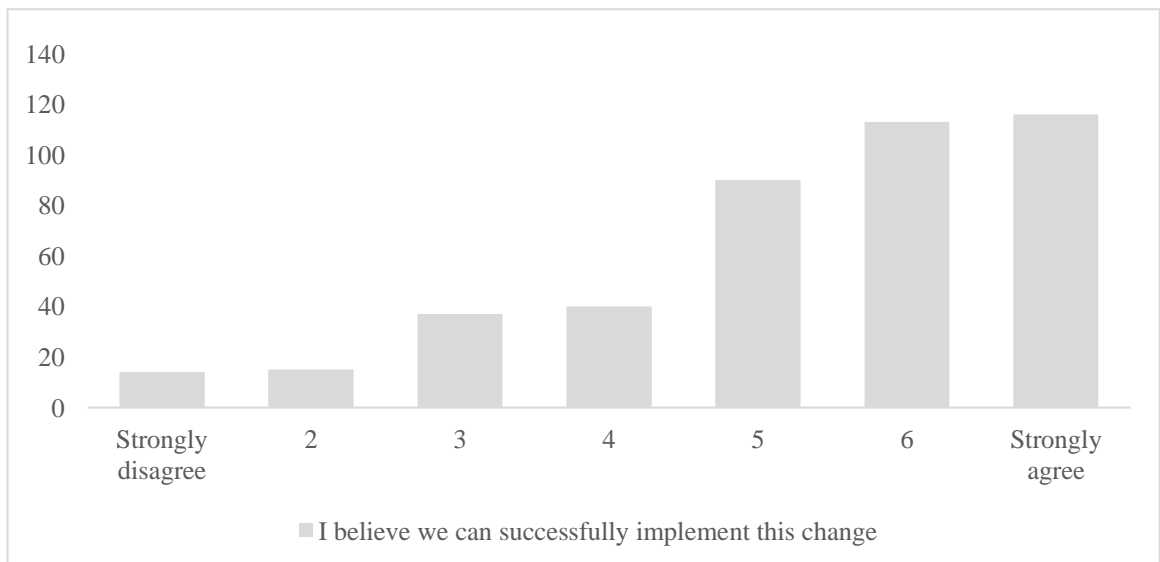
Figure 30: I believe we can successfully implement this change

Similarly, positive answers for the fourth item measuring change efficacy with 84% answering with 4 or more points agreeing that they believed the can implement the change successfully. This means that only 16% disagreed with the statement.

5. "We have the capability to implement this change successfully"
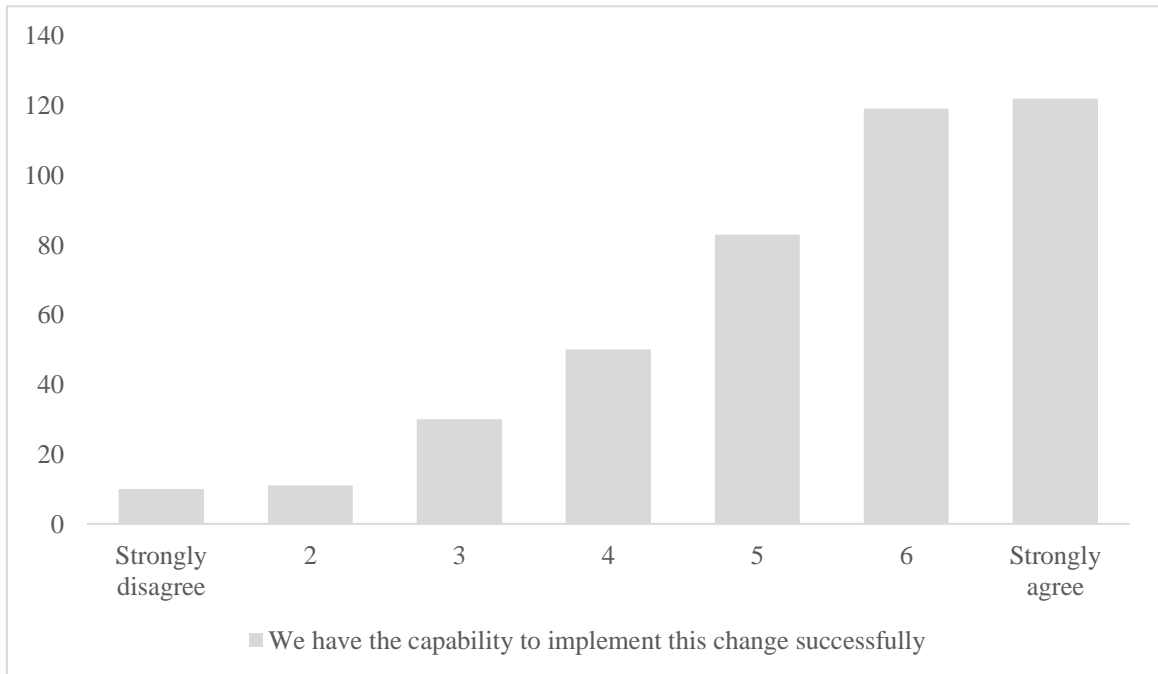
Figure 31: We have the capability to implement this change successfully

The last stamen measuring change efficacy asked the respondents to rate their answers to the statement from 1-7. From the figure above 88% of the respondents agreed and said they believed they had the capability to implement the change to working from home while 12% disagreed.

Overall, all answers to change efficacy items were high indicating to the high level of change efficacy among the respondents of this study. In other words, Arab employees who worked from home during Covid-19 lockdowns believed in their ability to perform the proposed change.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The relationship between change readiness and employee engagement has been a topic of discussion in the past decade. This study extended the previous work by introducing change efficacy as a moderating variable and studying the relationship during a sudden change. The context of this study is unique and contributes to understanding organizational members' behaviors in unplanned change and in times of crisis. The COVID-19 crisis is thought of as rehearsal for many novel settings that the world was heading towards in different fields. The procedures that were put in place to combat COVID-19 exponentially introduced work from home to large numbers of the workforce around the globe. Working from home was previously almost exclusive to freelancers, especially in the Middle East where work settings in the majority of countries haven't improved much in terms of flexibility.

As more and more people had to work from home, their change readiness, employee engagement, and change efficacy were important variables in this new system of work. Change readiness indicated the level of the psychological and behavioral preparedness for implementing organizational change, which is in this study working from home.

Discussion of Study's Variables

This section highlights the discussion regarding each variable of this study change readiness, employee engagement, and change efficacy. Moreover, the section includes a discussion of the differences between the variables and the demographic variables. This is concluded with a summary.

Change Readiness

The results also indicate that the respondents who worked from home during the COVID-19 crisis in SMEs had high levels of change readiness. This implies that the employees are supportive of working from home and have positive attitudes towards it during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Early definitions of change readiness linked it to resistance to change and negative attitudes. While modern definitions suggest that change Readiness is a cognitive state that impacts behaviors toward organizational

change (Armenakis et al., 1993). Based on that, high levels of change readiness contribute to facilitating both planned and unplanned change.

Within the current study, results indicated a significant relationship between change readiness and age groups, Position, company size, and the existence of previous WFH experience.

This result found no differences between change readiness and gender, this contradicts Choi (2018), Matthysen (2012), and Cunningham et al. (2002). This research found that as people get older, their change readiness level increases. This concurs with Choi's (2018) findings. Even though the mainstream idea about age makes people resist change, from this study it turns out that with age the cognitive state of accepting and supporting sudden changes in times of crisis increases. Significant difference in change readiness levels according to employees' position in their companies. As people climb up the organizational ladder, they are more ready to change. This goes in line with the findings of Mangunjaya (2011), however, it contradicts Matthysen (2012).

The findings of this study found that there is a relationship between change readiness and company size in which Arab employees in medium companies in the Middle East had higher levels of change readiness during a sudden change in the workplace. Finally, employees who had previous WFH experience had a higher level of change readiness during the sudden change in the work settings during the COVID-19 crisis for Arab employees in the Middle East.

No differences in the level of change readiness are attributed to gender and this matches the results of Weber and Weber (2001). Furthermore, no differences were found between change readiness and education which contradicts Mangundjaya's (2011) findings.

Employee Engagement

The analysis of the questionnaire showed that the respondents have high levels of work engagement. Engaged employees are more effective in answering job demands. This suggests that most of the Arab employees who work in SMEs are energetic about and feel connected to their work.

Employee engagement is considered precedent for successfully implementing organizational change. It is an integral part of all stages of the change process; that is, before, during, and after the change (Bhola, 2010). The changes COVID-19 lockdowns caused in the workplace required high level of tolerance to vagueness and continuous change. This study found significant differences between employee engagement levels and age groups. This implies that the older respondents are more engaged in their work. Significant differences were also found between employee engagement and their living arrangement. The Arab employees who were living with their families had the highest level of arrangement followed by the people living alone, the people living with life partners and the least were people living with roommates. Differences were also found in employee engagement and education level, people with less education were found to be more engaged.

Results of this study also found differences between employee engagement levels and the number of years of service in the organization, the more years the respondents had within their organization the higher their level of engagement. The same goes for the position of respondents within the organization, the higher the level of the respondent's position, the higher their employee engagement.

The size of the organization and employee engagement have a significant relationship in which respondents from medium organizations had a higher level of engagement. Moreover, the respondents who had previous WFH experience had higher levels of engagement during the change of work setting as an answer to the COVID-19 crisis for Arab employees.

Change Efficacy

The results of this study found that the respondents who worked from home during the COVID-19 crisis for Arab employees in SMEs had high levels of change efficacy. This indicates that the respondents who believed in their ability to implement the imposed change successfully during the pandemic challenging time.

This study reported that no differences in the level of change efficacy are attributed to position within the company, the number of years in the organization, education level, living arrangement, age, and gender. However, the findings of this study found that there is a relationship between change efficacy and company size in which respondents

from medium companies for Arab employees in the Middle East had higher levels of change efficacy during a sudden change in the workplace. Lastly, employees who had previous WFH experience had higher levels of reported self-efficacy.

Summary

The current study found that there is a moderate positive relationship between change readiness and employee engagement. This finding is in accordance with the findings of Mangundjaya (2011) and Matthysen (2012). Moreover, there is a significant statistical relationship between change readiness and change efficacy, and this goes in line with the literature. Change efficacy contributes to creating change readiness and is considered a predictor of individual change readiness (Armenakis et al., 1993; Wanberg & Banas, 2000; Holt et al., 2007; Weiner, 2009; Haqq & Natsir, 2019). The current study also found that there is a strong positive relationship between change efficacy and employee engagement.

In short, both of research hypotheses were supported. Hypothesis 1: There is a moderate positive relationship between change readiness and employee engagement for employees who worked from home in SMEs for Arab employees in the Middle East as a precaution to COVID-19 during the time of this study. And hypothesis 2: This relationship is strengthened by change efficacy which is the perception of the employee's own ability to successfully implement the change.

Table 17: The Study's Hypotheses Results

H1	There is a positive relationship between change readiness and employee engagement.	**Accepted**
H2	Change efficacy moderates the relationship between change readiness and employee engagement.	**Accepted**

The results in table 17 This suggests that engaged employees are more ready for implementing change and that employees who believe in their ability to implement the change are engaged in their work and supportive of organizational change.

Gender does not affect employee's engagement, change readiness, nor change efficacy. Company size and previous work from home experience increases the level of employees' change readiness, engagement, and change efficacy. Age, position, and the

number of years within an organization positively affect readiness for change and engagement.

This study draws on the theory of planned behavior to explain its findings as this theory is concerned with behaviors in a situational context. The context of this study is unique and thus these findings are valuable for researchers and practitioners.

Limitations and Recommendation for Future Research

Due to the limitation of resources and accessibility, the study surveyed only 425 Arab employees from 19 countries. A larger sample would generate more accurate results. Since this study explores findings in a contemporary setting, there are limited scholarly papers and research on the topic. Moreover, this is a cross-sectional study and provides results for a specific point in time. The research variables should be studied in a longitudinal study in the future after the pandemic is declared over. With the continually changing nature of the crisis, the uncertainty, and the changing facts lead to different results at different times.

While this study focuses on employee engagement, a focus on the organizational outcomes that employee engagement generates such as performance and productivity is essential. The sudden change and working from has many psychological effects such as anxiety, stress and fatigue that are important in accurately assessing the shift of employees' behavior (Khan, 2021). Those psychological effects were ignored in this study.

Besides, the continually changing nature of the crisis, the uncertainty, and the changing numbers and facts make it difficult to measure the variables. Similarly, the spiritual events that happened throughout the quarantine period added a dimension of stress and changing of habits that require a study from a psychological and anthropological point of view. Similarly, the events that happened throughout the quarantine period added a dimension of stress and changing of habits that require a study from a psychological and anthropological point of view.

Recommendation for Managers

The results of this study include some practical advice for managers and HR practitioners that are listed below:

1. Investing in increasing employees' engagement will pay off during difficult times and sudden changes. This can be achieved by improving communication and training opportunities.

2. Engaged employees who are energetic about their work have high levels of change readiness and thus will contribute positively to the success of the organizational change process and answer more efficiently to their job demands.

3. The self-view of the employees is important and affects their engagement and readiness thus developing their self-efficacy through training is important. It can highly decrease change resistance.

4. Stay ahead of any expected future changes by running drills for possible scenarios. For example, employees with previous WFH experience were more engaged, more ready for organizational change, and believed in their abilities to successfully perform the new tasks.

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APPENDIX I: ARABIC QUESTIONNAIRE

الجامعة: جامعة سكاريا

عزيزي/عزيزتي

تحية طيبة وبعد،،،

الموضوع / استبانة لغرض البحث العلمي

بداية أهديكم أطيب التحيات، ويطيب لي أن أضع بين أيديكم استبانة بغرض استكمال متطلبات الحصول على درجة الماجستير في تخصص إدارة الموارد البشرية من جامعة سكاريا، حيث تقوم الباحثة بإعداد دراسة بعنوان: العمل من المنزل خلال أزمة كوفيد-19 في الشرق الأوسط وتتطلب الدراسة استقصاء أراء مجموعة من الموظفين ذوي العلاقة بمتغيرات الدراسة.

إذ تتقدم الباحثة لكم بوافر الشكر وعظيم الامتنان على حسن تعاونكم معه، وتؤكد لكم أن المعلومات التي سوف يحصل عليها من قبلكم سيتعامل معها بسرية تامة، ولن تستخدم إلا لأغراض البحث العلمي.

وتأمل الباحثة في إجابتكم عن جميع فقرات الاستبانة بكل موضوعية سعياً للوصول إلى نتائج صادقة وصحيحة، وذلك بوضع الدرجة التي تعبر عن مدى موافقتكم عليها حسب الواقع الذي تعملون به.

وتقبلوا فائق التقدير والاحترام،،،

الباحثة
دالية النجار

أولاً: البيانات الديموغرافية

	الجنس			.1
	أنثى		أفضل عدم القول	
	ذكر			
	العمر			.2
	20-29		50-59	
	30-39		أكثر من 60	
	40-49			
	وضع المعيشة:			.3
	أعيش وحدي		أعيش مع عائلتي	
	أعيش مع شركاء سكن		أخرى	
	أعيش مع شريك حياة			
	المؤهل التعليمي			.4
	ثانوية عامة		دراسات عليا	
	بكالوريوس		دبلوم	
	عدد سنوات الخدمة في الشركة الحالية			.5
	أقل من سنة		من 15-20	
	من 1-5 سنوات		أكثر من 20	
	من 5-10			
	6. الدولة: -------------			
	7. المستوى الوظيفي			
	موظف الخط الأول		مستوى إداري	
	المستوى المتوسط			
	8. حجم الشركة			
	صغيرة		متوسطة	

	9. هل لديك تجربة في العمل من المنزل قبل أزمة كورونا؟
نعم	لا

ثانيًا: فقرات الاستبيان

1. الاستعدادية للتغيير

درجة الموافقة					الفقرات	
موافق بشدة	4	3	2	أرفض بشدة		
					كان لدي شعور جيد تجاه العمل من المنزل أثناء أزمة كوفيد.19-	1
					كانت تجربة بدء العمل من المنزل إيجابية بالنسبة لي أثناء أزمة كوفيد.19-	2
					لقد وجدت تجربة العمل من المنزل أثناء أزمة كوفيد 19 باعثة على النشاط.	3
					أدى العمل من المنزل أثناء إغلاق كوفيد -19 إلى تحسين أدائي في العمل.	4
					أدى العمل من المنزل أثناء إغلاق كوفيد-19 إلى تبسيط مهامي في العمل.	5
					كنت ملتزما لإنجاح تجربة العمل من المنزل أثناء أزمة كوفيد-19.	6
					كنت على استعداد تام لتقديم مساهمة كبيرة في إنجاح تجربة العمل من المنزل.	7
					كنت على استعداد لبذل طاقة أكبر لضمان نجاح تجربة العمل من المنزل.	8

2. الانتماء المعنوي للموظفين

درجة الموافقة						الفقرات	
موافق بشدة	5	4	3	2	أرفض بشدة		
						أثناء العمل أكون مليء بالطاقة والحيوية.	1
						عملي يشعرني بالقوة والنشاط	2
						أشعر بالرغبة في الذهاب إلى العمل عندما أستيقظ في الصباح	3
						لدي حماس للقيام بعملي	4
						أنا فخور/ة بالعمل الذي أقوم به	5
						عملي يلهمني	6
						أنا منغمس/ة في عملي	7

						الفقرات	
						أعمل باندفاع وحماس شديد	8
						أشعر بالسعادة عندما أعمل بشكل مكثف.	9

3. الكفاءة الذاتي

	درجة الموافقة					الفقرات	
موافق بشدة	6	5	4	3	2	أرفض بشدة	
						لدي القدرة على إنجاح تجربة العمل من المنزل في مؤسستي.	1
						أستطيع العمل من المنزل بشكل ممتاز	2
						أنا قادر/ة على أداء واجبات وظيفتي بنجاح أثناء العمل من المنزل	3
						أؤمن أنه يمكننا تنفيذ تجربة العمل من المنزل بنجاح	4
						لدينا القدرة على تنفيذ هذا التغيير والعمل من المنزل أثناء أزمة كوفيد-19 بنجاح	5

APPENDIX II: ENGLISH QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaire letter

Dear Participant,

I would like to invite you to participate in a questionnaire for the completion of my master's degree in Human Resources Management at Sakarya University. My study aims at evaluating working from home during COVID-19 by examining the relationship between change readiness and employee engagement with efficacy as a moderating factor.

My supervisor and the university see the research as appropriate and worthy. The results of this study will be helpful to future academic research and for practitioners alike.

I humbly request that you complete the electronic questionnaire. Participation is voluntary and all answers will be treated as anonymous and will be electronically collated to form the database of the research.

Should you wish to participate, please click on the following link:
https://forms.gle/BFddF8aLV1pDRVGSA

Thank you for your time,

1. Change Readiness

Article		Scale				
		Strongly disagree	2	3	4	Strongly agree
1	I had a good feeling about working from home.					
2	I experienced shifting to working from home positively.					
3	I found working from home during COVID-19 refreshing.					
4	Working from home improved performance during the COVID-19 lockdown.					
5	Working from home simplified work during the COVID-19 lockdown.					
6	I devoted myself to the process of changing the work setting to work from home.					
7	I was willing to make a significant contribution to the process of shifting to working from home.					
8	I was willing to put energy into the process of change to ensure the success of working from home.					

2. Employee Engagement

Article		scale					
		Strongly disagree	2	3	4	5	Strongly agree
1	At my work, I feel bursting with energy.						
2	At my job, I feel strong and vigorous						
3	When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work						
4	I am enthusiastic about my job						
5	I am proud of the work that I do						
6	My job inspires me						
7	I am immersed in my work						
8	I get carried away when I'm working						
9	I feel happy when I am working intensely.						

3. Change Efficacy

	Article	Scale						
		Strongly disagree	2	3	4	5	6	Strongly agree
1	I have the capability to implement the initiated change							
2	I can implement this change in my job							
3	I am capable of successfully performing my job duties with the proposed organizational change							
4	I believe we can successfully implement this change							
5	We have the capability to implement this change successfully							

CURRICULUM VITAE

Dalya is a goodwill ambassador and a regional director for Children of Peace, the largest peace network in the Middle East. She cofounded Razan Alnajjar Bursary to financially help impoverished female nursing majored students in Gaza. In 2016, Alnajjar Graduated with honors from the business faculty of the Islamic University of Gaza, one of the most prestigious universities in Palestine. She also attended summer courses at the University of Delaware, Gorge Town University and San Diego University as part of her MEPI Leadership training. During her education Dalya worked with Tamer Institute for community education as a life skills trainer and she trained more than 200 young adult, many who grew to become very successful adults.

Alnajjar has been very active in the voluntary work since she was 15 years old. From interning at local municipality to starting several community initiatives, she was a role model and the first to introduce the concept of voluntary work and change initiatives in her small city, her efforts were crowned with the establishment of a youth city center were young people had a safe space to learn and talk about their concerns and ideas.

Along the years Dalya diversified the portfolio of her skills and worked as broadcaster, website editor, system developer, executive assistant, project manager, and fundraiser. She cofounded three startups, including Xyla Water. Currently, Alnajjar works as a business consultant and account manager for Perfumery Solutions and its registered brands.

Born and raised in Gaza, to become a fighter, she advocates for justice and gender equality. That is why she was invited to speak in many international conferences including Business for Peace, where she was the youngest panelist in the history of the summit which is annually organized by the Noble prize committee. Dalya was also invited to Global Solutions Summit which is organized by the G20 committee.

Breaking barriers and defying societal barricades, Dalya stands as an example to many women in Palestine, she has been featured in the UNESCO Courier, and named the person of the month in different websites. On top of all, Alnajjar has a published story, and many published poems. She writes in different platforms about the situation in the Middle East. She also published an academic paper (doi:10.47542/sauied.762680).