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Austrian future cubicle: commuting, e-commuting or both? Michal Beno, Dagmar Caganova

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Austrian future cubicle: commuting, e-commuting or both?

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Abstract: Austria tries to reach its decarbonisation targets by 2050. The significant attention lies in the carbon intensity of transport, with commuting of particular interest. The paper presents E-Commuting practices that are suitable tools to intervene in these journeys; however, it seems to be difficult. Exploring and understanding the commuting system of everyday lives is crucial. It is through this understanding that alternative avenues for intervention arise, for example into the practice of flexible working models. To understand the influence of e-commuting, the questionnaire via WhatsApp of 685 respondents was conducted, which considered an understanding of work and the commute necessary. The aim of the paper was to explore the workers' routines for in-office days and work-from-home days. The results show that the employees want to work remotely full or in hybrid mode and this trend is going forward. The employees are more productive with flexibility mode – 73.08%; they wish more flexibility in terms of returning to the cubicle – 71.79%; they desire the same amount of time of flexibility and going into the cubicle – 70.51%. Finally, in the case of any flexibility in their current organization, they would consider looking for another job that did not require return to the cubicle with the same salary – 53.85%.

1 Introduction

The return to the cubicle debate continues with different directions and no clear resolution for employers and employees. Modern organizations have seriously considered diversifying their geographical footprint with cubicles closer to their workforce or flexible work models. However, recent data indicate that those organizations that wish to have their workforce back in office in 5 days a week could fail [1]. Generally, the cubicles reached by the cars have filled back up fastest. Based on CBRE [2] survey results, 85% of participants want workforce in the cubicle at least half the time, despite a hybrid policy. But who should determine the required days? Will it force more employees back into the cubicle or will Work from Home (WFM) or hybrid work practices persist? There is no onesize-fits-all solution to the return to cubicle approach but as Beno et al. [3] emphasized "managers should be prepared for incidents, accidents and emergencies by having a magical "Plan B" in place". It has become increasingly clear that work flexibility increases [4,5] and employees are happier about shortening the week in favour of flexibility, even, if it involves a salary reduction [6]. The authors of the paper are of the opinion that there is a way to join both worlds: commuting and e-commuting. The authors of the paper have a unique opportunity to bring the change in relation to commuting and e-commuting, and this should not be squandered [7,8].

The research questions for this study are as follows:

- How do Austrians travel to work?
- Will Austrians change cars with other practices?
- What is flexible working as a practice?

• In what ways does flexibility relate to commuting?

The authors of the paper firstly discuss the current state of e-commuting, providing definitions and previous research. Next, the methodology is being described. The fourth part of the paper presents the findings. Then follows the section presenting the authors of the paper discussions. Finally, the last section is devoted to their own conclusion.

1.1 E-commuting

Commuting is an important aspect of our lives. In 2021, the rate of regional commuting in Austria in the same region was 3731.4 thousand and 436.6 thousand in another region [9]. Further data indicates that Austrians commuted on average for 26 minutes and 27 km in 2020. In the surveyed region, commuters spend 31 minutes in Lower Austria [10].

Commuting is a daily activity that generates the lowest level of positive affect, as well as a relatively high level of negative affect [11]. The recent study indicates that there is a positive correlation between the indicators of 1-9 minutes and 45-59 minutes of commuting and happiness [12]. An effective transportation system increases productivity and can be seen as the key to shortening commute time. But commuters with longer commuting time report lower subjective well-being [13]. Christian et al. [14] further added that over time long commutes may contribute to obesity and other poor health outcomes. According to Friman et al. [15] satisfaction with daily commute linearly affects both experiential wellbeing and life satisfaction and



that higher satisfaction with daily travel is highest for those that walk and cycle and lowest for those that use public transport. Beňo [7] stressed that commuters in Austria preferred cars over public transport.

E-commuting means working remotely on a full-time or hybrid basis. Working remotely reduces travel to the cubicles primarily through modern information and communication technologies. For the purpose of this paper work, the commuters are those who travel into work daily and e-commuters are those who partly work from home and commute or fully work from home without commuting.

Nilles [16] started the research of connection between e-working and commuting. Since then, many other e-working studies have been done [17-21]. De Vos et al. [19] stressed that e-working policies seem to be effective of trying to alleviate congestion and transport-related emissions. It saves time otherwise spent in commuting on a daily basis [22]. Additionally, employees can save considerably by e-working [23].

2 Methodology

This work is based on quantitative primary research using WhatsApp. The main aim of the study was to explore the workers' routines for in-office days and work-from-home days. Therefore, commuters and WhatsApp users were selected to participate in this study as a target audience. The research was carried out from 1st December till 9th December 2022.

For this study, a sample of 685 adults from 22 participating organizations, age 18+ from Lower Austria were asked in German to give their feedback to set questions in questionnaire using WhatsApp. A broad range of companies were surveyed, with respondents drawn from many different occupational groups and from across many industries within the private sector. So far, the participating organizations were recruited through email invitation and the authors' contacts.

All the participants engaging in the WhatsApp questionnaire were fully informed in relation to confidentiality, privacy, sensitivity, and data protection. However, all the respondents were informed that participation was entirely voluntary.

2.1 WhatsApp questionnaire survey

The WhatsApp questionnaire survey included 11 questions designed to examine the role of a range of workforce on in-office days and work-from-home days in relation to commuting. Most of the questions were of a Likert-type format, requiring the respondent to indicate the level of quantity, periodicity, and agreement on a different point scale.

2.2 Data collection

When adapting our methodology to a phone-based strategy, the authors of the paper used WhatsApp as the

discussion platform. This tool is widely used among the Austrians. The questionnaire data plan was activated after a potential participant provided informed consent by sending a text message back to the researchers. The series of short videos explaining, how to respond to questions and interact with participants was provided. The answers of the respondents were filled in excel sheet by investigators.

3 Result and discussion

So, 22 organizations agreed to participate in the survey. The participating organizations were based in Lower Austria (n=22) and represented only the private sector. The distribution of participating organizations by organizational size of employees was as follows: large (≥ 200) 54.55%, medium (20-199) 18.18% and small (≤ 19) 27.27%. A total sample of 685 responded to the study, out of them, 46.42% of respondents were female. The mean age of respondents was 30.3. Most (78.69%) were married or living with a partner. The majority (89.34%) had permanent employment status.

Driving cars is still the most popular commuting method among Austrians. 41.75% of the Austrian households own one car and 31.24% two or three cars (see Table1).

Ta	Table 1 How many cars do you own?					
	N=685	Ν	%			
	0	123	17.96			
	1	286	41.75			
	2-3	214	31.24			
	4 or more	62	9.05			

However, the survey also found that there is a change in the ownership of cars since the pandemic. 28 respondents (4.09%) sold a car. It means that, in total 151 households do not own any car (total 19% increase). As the tech and automotive industries advanced electrification, households reconsidered buying hybrid or electric cars, 45 respondents bought them (6.57%) as demonstrated in Table 2.

Table 2 Has COVID-19 changed your car ownership?

N=685	Ν	%
Yes, I changed to hybrid, electric car	45	6.57
Yes, I bought an additional car	26	3.80
Yes, I sold a car	28	4.09
No	586	85.55

The pandemic remade the way Austrians work and commute. The authors of the paper have asked respondents to give an answer about their transportation needs today. 245 (45.88%) still drive a car, 289 (54.12%) combine car and public transport (see Table 3). 74.17% (112) people said they use public transport, 19.21% (29) use bike/scooter and 6.62% (10) walk (see Table 3).



Table 3 How often do you use the following modes of

transportation?		
N=534	Ν	%
Car	245	45.88
Hybrid – car & public	289	54.12
N=151		
Public	112	74.17
Bike	29	19.21
Walking	10	6.62

Interestingly, despite the car dependence, 24.09% (165) the Austrians walk more often since the pandemic, 45.69% (313) about the same amount and only 14.01% (96) less often (see Table 4).

Table 4 Since COVID-19, do you walk more often, less often or

about the same amount?			
N=685	Ν	%	
More often	165	24.09	
About the same amount	313	45.69	
Less often	96	14.01	
NA	111	16.20	

Working remotely saved the Austrians hours of commute time. More than a quarter of Austrians spend more than 30-44 minutes on a one-way commute, just under the 23.65% who spend 10-19 minutes commuting (see Table 5).

Table 5 Before COVID-19, how long	g took your journey (one
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way) to work?			
N=685	Ν	%	
<10	94	13.72	
10-19	162	23.65	
20-29	105	15.33	
30-44	183	26.72	
45-59	36	5.26	
60+	22	3.21	
No commute/WFM	83	12.12	

Before the pandemic, only 48 respondents (7%) worked from home (no commute), during the pandemic there is an increase of 79% (233) and now 83 (12.12%) of them work remotely without commuting (total increase of 42%) as shown in Table 6. It is evident that organizations were able to create culture when part of the staff prefer to be around a lot and part of their staff being around more flexible.

Table 6 Did you work from home (no commute) before COVID-10 Juring pandemic and now?

19, auring panaemic and now?		
	Ν	%
Before	48	7.00
During	233	34.00
Now	83	12.12
Hybrid	151	22.00

For workers returning to some pattern of the morning commute, the authors asked respondents if they expected their work commute to change. More than one quarter of the Austrians indicated that they expect a change, almost 65% did not expect it (see Table 7).

Table 7 Do you forecast that your work commute to change?

N=685	Ν	%
Yes	172	25.11
No	445	64.96
I do not know	68	9.93

More than half of them (51.16%) expect that they will drive to work more often, almost one-fifth of them (20.93%) expect to commute less due to the flexibility of their work options. 13.95% expect to walk or bike/scooter more often. Only 12.21% will take public transportation more often (see Table 8).

Table 8 How do you forecast your work commute to change?

N=172	Ν	%
Drive more often	88	51.16
Commute less due WFM	36	20.93
Walk or bike more often	24	13.95
Take public more often	21	12.21
I do not know	3	1.74

Human beings make decisions based on the options that are placed in front of them. When the respondents were asked about the status of their work model, nearly oneeighth worked remotely, almost one-fifth worked in hybrid working model and 451 respondents worked in cubicles (see Table 9).

rubic Franc you currently wo	i kung ji O	m none.
N=685	Ν	%
Yes – no commute	83	12.12
Yes – hybrid	151	22.04
No	451	65.84

Table 9 Are you currently working from home?

Employees want to work remotely full or in hybrid mode going forward. The respondents (N=234) were asked to what extent they agree or disagree with the following statements:

- I am more productive with flexibility mode -• 73.08%.
- I wish more flexibility in terms of returning to the cubicle – 71.79%.
- I desire the same amount of time of flexibility and going into the cubicle -70.51%.
- No flexibility is in my current organization, I would consider looking for another job that did not require return to the cubicle with the same salary - 53.85%.



12.12% (83) respondents are the opinion that all at home seems to be the right mix of working model, 151 (22.04%) prefer splitting at home and at the cubicle, 451 (65.84%) think that all at the cubicle is the right mix of working (see Table 10).

Table 10 WFM, hybrid or on-site, what is the right mix of working?

working.		
N=685	Ν	%
WFM, no commute	83	12.12
Hybrid	151	22.04
On-site	451	65.84

Driving cars is still the most popular commuting method among Austrians. Abrahamse et al. [24] data demonstrate that the more respondents felt able to reduce car use for commuting and the less favorable their attitude toward car use, the less often they tended to drive to work. This is in the line of obtained results from thi study where 151 households do not own any car (total 19% increase).

Interestingly, the mode of ransportation in Austria still does not lead to sustainable development. Comparable to Guth et al. [25] study where an increase of crossmunicipality commuting volumes as of the commuting distances can be observed. 245 (45.88%) still drive a car, 289 (54.12%) combine car and public transport. 74.17% (112) people said they use public transport, 19.21% (29) use bike/scooter and 6.62% (10) walk. This may concur with the widespread use of mobile phones on public transport nowadays, which indicates that commute time is often used by people to communicate with their friends and family [26]. Interestingly, despite the car dependence, 24.09% (165) the Austrians walk more often since pandemic, 45.69% (313) about the same amount and only 14.01% (96) less often. Due to a shift from private motorized transportation to more active transportation, this can, among other things, deliver significant health benefits [27].

With the cost-of-living, energy crisis attacking the Austrian workforce from all angles, maybe working from home will be costlier than commuting in. However, working remotely saved the Austrians hours of commute time. Similar to Beňo [28] results study. More than a quarter of Austrians spend more than 30-44 minutes on a one-way commute, just under the 23.65% who spend 10-19 minutes commuting. Almost in accordance with the recent study which indicates that there is a positive correlation between the indicators of 1-9 minutes and 45-59 minutes of commuting and happiness [7].

Hajal [29] highlighted that teleworking's popularity was rising. This confirms the collected data from this study. Before the pandemic, only 48 respondents (7%) worked from home (no commute), during the pandemic there was an increase of 79% (233) and now 83 (12.12%) of them work remotely without commuting (total increase of 42%). It confirms Beno and Hvorecky [28] statement that e-working and the home office are not just a solution to a crisis.

According to the survey respondents, willingness to work remotely full or in hybrid mode is going forward. Those e-workers feel being more productive. Comparably to Bloom et al. [30] and Beno and Hvorecky [28] study. No flexibility in current organization, 53.85% of employees would consider looking for another job that did not require returning to the cubicle with the same salary. The recent study highlights that after their move to home offices, the employees are prepared to accept a pay cut. There are differences among countries, but two interesting outcomes were noticed in the studied countries:

- 1. The higher age, the greater the readiness to accept a cut;
- 2. The smaller the cut, the greater the readiness to accept it [6].

Further other survey shows similar data [32].

12.12% (83) respondents are the opinion that all at home seems to be the right mix of working model, 151 (22.04%) prefer splitting at home and at the cubicle, 451 (65.84%) think that all at the cubicle is the right mix of working. These data are on the lines on Cushman & Wakefield [31] survey where on average 2.7 days on office and, 2.3 days at home.

4 Conclusions

Different types of transport are key accelerators for the development of population mobility [33]. For many, commutes are time-consuming experiences. The trip from home to work and back is therefore an important aspect of modern life, affecting commuters' well-being. The development of the transport system is essential for the economic development of the country [34].

• How do Austrians travel to work?

Whether you live in the city or must drive in from the country almost all Austrians have to deal with some type of commute. In fact, based on received data, cars still dominate in transportation. A daily commute is an essential factor in lives of Austrians. 245 (45.88%) still drive a car, 289 (54.12%) combine car and public transport. 74.17% (112) people said they use public transport, 19.21% (21) use a bike/scooter and 6.62% (10) walk.

• Will Austrians change cars with other practices?

The past years have not changed, Austrians still love cars. However, the survey also found that there has been a change in the ownership of cars since the pandemic. 28 respondents (4.09%) sold a car. As the tech and automotive industries advanced electrification, households reconsidered buying hybrid or electric cars, 45 respondents bought them (6.57%). More than one quarter of the Austrians indicated that they expect a change, almost 65% did not expect it.



• What is flexible working as a practice?

Nearly one-eighth worked remotely, almost one-fifth worked in hybrid working model and 451 respondents worked in cubicles. The employees want to work remotely in full or in hybrid mode and it is going forward.

- In what ways does flexibility relate to commuting?
 - I am more productive with flexibility mode 73.08%.
 - I wish more flexibility in terms of returning to the cubicle 71.79%.
 - I desire the same amount of time of flexibility and going into the cubicle 70.51%.
 - No flexibility in my current organization, I would consider looking for another job that did not require return to the cubicle with the same salary 53.85%.

As a limitation to this study, it should be noted that we have used a retrospective measure of e-commuting use behaviour only in Lower Austria. This did not allow the authors of the paper to fully test it. Further, a native language questionnaire with an extensive vocabulary and mastery of the language allows the respondents to express themselves but may limit the interpretation when translated into English. A multi-country survey may potentially be part of the further investigation. Furthermore, costs analysis whether to commute or working from home represents future topic interests.

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Review process

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