

Working from abroad - workation as a mobility flow benefit

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Abstract: This paper explores the status quo of the concept workation in Austria among business executives. The objective of this quantitative study is to gain an understanding of this dislocated work form. The following research questions were set to find answers to: 1) What is the status quo of the workation in Austria in times of multiple crises? and 2) Will the workation help employers to retain their workforce? Based on the data, for managers workation means recharging one's batteries and at the same time working productively and efficiently. Additionally, this survey illustrates a possible way that organisations can retain the talent on their teams. Organisations offering workations accept that their managers and workforce will be out of the office for a while. Most managers stay away for less than a week. Three reasons given by managers to explain why the workation is a success are: 1) an increase in job satisfaction, 2) an increase in productivity and 3) improved work-life balance. We tested our hypotheses in a survey study of 178 respondents in Austria. H1.4, H2 and H3 were supported. The paper concludes with a discussion of whether workations will continue to be important for employers and employees in the future.

1 Introduction

The existence of work went through some tectonic changes including the place where work can be conducted, from traditional to Taylorist cubicles [1]. Research demonstrates that e-work has been shown to be an enabler of work-life balance [2]; but research is uncertain about whether e-work has beneficial or unfavourable effects [3-4].

Uriely [5] distinguished between travelling workers and working tourists in terms of their work characteristics and their demographic profile. Cohen [6] described working holidays as a form of tourism "in which youth from one country travel into another to work for short periods, mostly during summer school vacations". The boundaries between leisure and work are blurring. In addition to the much-cited COVID-19 crisis, there are a) pull and b) push factors regarding the popularity of e-work: a) increased productivity, time saving, less or no commuting, better work-life balance; b) inadequate office infrastructure, noise, distraction, toxic work culture [7].

Modern digital tools provide exemplary perceptions into human patterns of mobility including workflow. The elaboration and application of such data are tantamount to gaining a reasoned advantage in today's data-driven society. The movements of human beings within and among urban centres influence essential aspects of society. Generally, traffic congestion, migration flows, the spread

of infectious diseases "are processes in which the presence of mobility flows induces a net change of the spatial distribution of some quantity of interest" [8]. Measuring human mobility is critical to understanding population wellbeing [9].

As a consequence, an interesting area of analysis is the initiative of some organisations to consider the expansion of workations. More specifically, this paper will try to find answers to the following research questions:

1. What is the status quo of the workation in Austria in times of multiple crises?
2. Will the workation help employers to retain their workforce?

2 Literature review

The workation seems to be the beginning of a post-Covid era where remote work meets vacation (yielding a portmanteau word from "work" and "vacation") or as mentioned by Yoshida [10] "a neologism combining the words 'work' and 'vacation' ". Pecsek [11] defines workations as "a hybrid type of tourism when tourists travel for either leisure or dual (business and leisure) motive and due to the modern technology, they perform both work and leisure activities away from home". It is a combination of work and vacation for a fixed interval that encompasses both work time and leisure time. The distinction between "workationing" and "e-working" is focused on the amount of time spent on a workation versus

working remotely. The e-worker works entirely off-site (commonly at a fixed location), whereas the workationer works remotely on a short-term trip. To sum up, the workation is characterised by the performance of work from a holiday locality on an uninterrupted cause with different workable amounts of time without consuming holidays or other forms of paid leave and without any pay cut.

The office as a place of work evolved into having a more specific function. It can be seen as a spatial interface for a team where people meet for informal conversations, personal exchanges or to hold creative meetings. The home office is the place where you can work undisturbed and can therefore concentrate better. Working in the digital age requires these important skills that need to be developed: dealing with a flood of information, boundary management, digital-social collaboration and maintaining a work-life balance. The temporal and spatial flexibility of knowledge and office work means that new places are opening up where professional activities can be pursued. In 2022, the holiday travel intensity of the Austrian population was 75.5%, with 10.58 million holiday trips made abroad, and 3.06 million trips for business purposes [12].

3 Methodology

In order to find the answers to these research questions, a quantitative study using a Google form was undertaken. The study was conducted between 1 June and 30 August 2023. The distribution of e-questionnaires was done via email and WhatsApp. The respondents accessed an online survey through a link specifically set up for this research [13]. As Glazier & Topping [14] highlighted, "social media is a powerful tool that can be used to build connections and share information." Data collection through this remote online platform is feasible, safe and very convenient [15].

The e-survey was sent to 354 organisations across Austria where e-work can be done, and we received 256 responses. After deleting incomplete responses and no-variance responses, we had a final sample of 178 respondents (usable response rate: 50.28%).

Four out of 10 managers were from to the top management with men dominant. Women dominated on the middle and low management levels. Among the managers, 37.64% (67) were female and 62.36% (111) male. Generation Millennials (Generation Y) dominated with 68.54% of respondents, followed by Generation X with 25.84%, Generation Z with 5.06% and 0.56% of Boomers II. The average age of respondents was 37,1 years as shown in Figure 1 (the youngest manager was 27 years old and the oldest was 60).

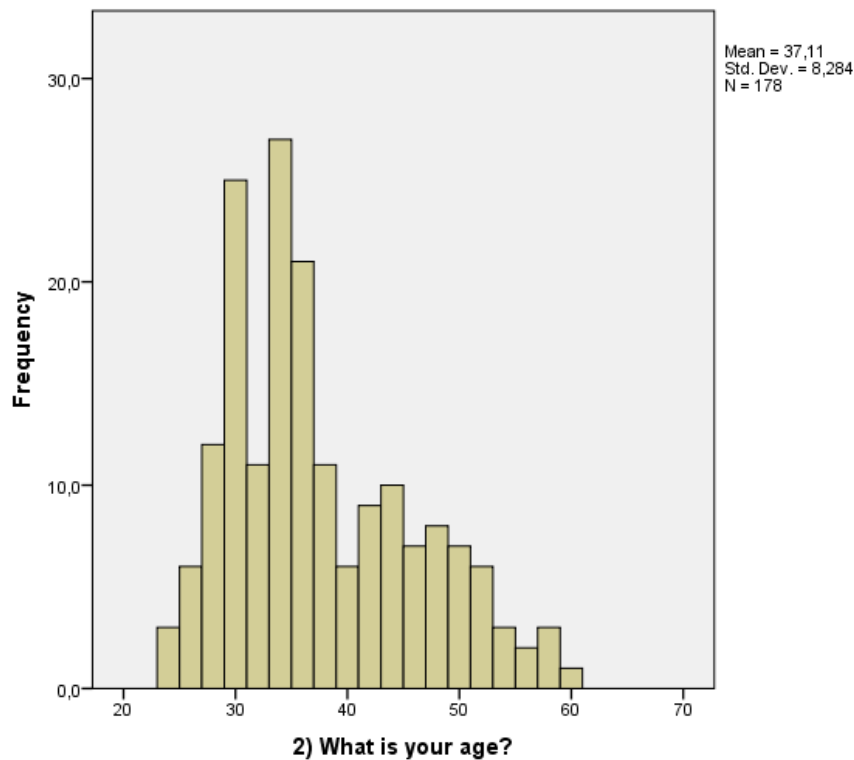


Figure 1 Age of respondents

Male managers were more frequently single than were their female counterparts. But 41.79% of female managers were married, compared to 36.27% of men. Overall, 26.4% of managers had obtained secondary education; with 25.3% with a bachelor's degree and 32% with a master's degree. A total of 115 (64.6%) managers out of 178 respondents were childless.

All participating managers were informed of the purpose of the study and assured that responses would be confidential. Participation was voluntary. The questions were posed using an online questionnaire to evaluate the status quo of workations in Austria from the point of view of managers. Questions were rated on a dichotomous (yes/no), 5-point Likert-type scale (consideration) from positive to critical. Two open ended questions were included, and periodicity of workations (from less than one week to two months or more) was taken into reckoning. A cross-tabulation analysis was used. The results obtained were investigated by means of statistics software.

The sample was a heterogeneous group of managers working in the service sector, including customer service, marketing, startups, e-commerce, IT, recruiting and business to business.

4 Results

In the modern working world and the alternative ways of working without human contact, the workation is getting a facelift. Whether it is known as a workation, workcation, worcation, workoliday, woliday or some other term, it simply means working during a vacation. A total of 45.5% (81) out of all managers were able to do a workation, compared with 34.3% (61 managers) who had no experience of this. A total of 20.2% of managers (36) are willing to work in this way in the future (Table 1).

Table 1 Do you allow your workforce workations?

	n	%
No	61	34.3
Not yet, but will	36	20.2
Yes	81	45.5
Total	178	100

Organisations globally have been forced to come up with strategies to cope with shortages of skilled workforce. They have to compete harder for a smaller pool of talent and spend more time and funds on hiring. For this reason, the authors were interested in identifying this tool as a hiring strategy among managers. A total of 65.5% (117) of managers would like to implement this in communication in recruiting. More than three fifths of managers consider

the workation as positive and rather positive. Only 22.5% see this flexibility tool as critical as demonstrated in the next table (Table 2).

Table 2 How are workations viewed by employees?

	n	%
positive	64	36.0
rather positive	43	24.2
neither positive nor negative	10	5.6
critical	40	22.5
no data available	20	11.2
prefer not to say	1	0.6
Total	178	100

The success or failure of a workation team hinges on whether everybody feels included. A total of 49 (60.5%) out of 81 managers regarded the team workation as very positive and 32 (39.5%) as positive. It seems that by implementing a workation, managers created an optimal learning experience for everybody by building and managing their team. Crafting an effective workation strategy begins by emphasising whatever is working, adjusting whatever is not working and adapting the strategy as lessons are learned. The greatest challenges of this flexible working approach according to managers (n=117) include organisational (36.8%), legal (23.1%), taxes (19.7%), childcare (11.1%) and data protection (9.4%). But the workation is creating a need for better coordination both at work and on holiday, since both are remote-capable collaboration stations. Organisations must cope with non-essential workforce completing their work not only from home but also on holiday. Shifting from working in an office to a holiday location is a change. How long should we work from the holiday destination? The majority of the 117 managers prefer less than one week (35.9%), almost three tenths would prefer 1-2 weeks and more than one sixth 3-4 weeks. Interestingly, few managers would prefer a workation of over a month (11) or two or more months (7). Possible explanations may be that the hardest part of a workation is the loneliness and lack of social interaction between team members.

Generally, everything is about balance. A workation schedule becomes beneficial, creating a balance between all motivations and satisfying the needs of managers, including the freedom that they need for productivity. The three reasons why the workation works best (Table 3), according to managers, are: 1) increase in job satisfaction (31.6%), 2) increase in productivity (29.1%) and 3) improved work-life balance (17.9%).

Working from abroad - workation as a mobility flow benefit
 Michal Beno, Dagmar Caganova, Bohdana Bobinics

Table 3 What are top three reasons to implement workations?

Top 1	n	%	Top 2	n	%	Top 3	n	%
Increased job satisfaction	37	31.6	Positive impact on employees' physical health	16	13.7	Increased work-life balance	21	17.9
Increased productivity	34	29.1	Breaking the daily routine	15	12.8	Increased loyalty	18	15.4
Increased quality of work	14	12.0	Increased quality of work	14	12.0	Increased creativity	15	12.8
Positive impact on employees' mental health	8	6.8	Increased creativity	13	11.1	No need to use any paid time off	13	11.1
Positive impact on employees' physical health	8	6.8	Getting to know new places and people	11	9.4	Shape company culture	13	11.1
Getting to know new places and people	6	5.1	Increased work-life balance	10	8.5	Breaking the daily routine	10	8.5
Shape company culture	5	4.3	Increased loyalty	9	7.7	Increased quality of work	10	8.5
Ability to work remotely	2	1.7	Shape company culture	9	7.7	Ability to work remotely	8	6.8
Increased work-life balance	2	1.7	No need to use any paid time off	8	6.8	Increased productivity	7	6.0
Increased loyalty	1	0.9	Positive impact on employees' mental health	7	6.0	Getting to know new places and people	2	1.7
			Ability to work remotely	5	4.3			
Total	117	100	Total	117	100	Total	117	100.0

H1: *There is a significant positive or negative relationship between the perception of the workation mode (age, gender, education, parents).*

H1.1: There is no statistically significant relationship between age and workation rating (Kruskal Wallis Test, Chi-square 3.043, Asymp. Sig. 0.385, see Table 4) – hypothesis not supported.

Table 4 Test Statistics

How are workations viewed by employees?		Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
What is your age?	positive	0.147	64	0.002	0.932	64	0.002
	rather positive	0.113	43	0.200*	0.956	43	0.095
	neither positive nor negative	0.166	10	0.200*	0.913	10	0.305
	critical	0.158	40	0.014	0.920	40	0.008

Test Statistics ^{a,b}	
	What is your age?
Chi-Square	3.043
df	3
Asymp. Sig.	0.385
a. Kruskal Wallis Test	
b. Grouping Variable: How are workations viewed by employees?	

Working from abroad - workation as a mobility flow benefit
 Michal Beno, Dagmar Caganova, Bohdana Bobinics

H1.2: There is no statistically significant relationship between workation rating and gender (to test the hypothesis, the χ^2 test of independence in the contingency table was used; based on the performed test ($\chi^2(3) = 1.098$; p-value = 0.778 (Table 5)), we do not reject the tested hypothesis at the level of significance $\alpha = 5\%$) – hypothesis not supported.

H1.3.: The evaluation of the workation does not depend on the highest level of education achieved (tested with Spearman correlation coefficient, $R = -0.056$ with p 0.513) – hypothesis not supported.

H1.4: There is a statistically significant relationship between the workation rating and the number of children.

It can be seen from the Table 6 that as the number of children increases, the positive relationship to workations grows (test of independence: χ^2 test ($\chi^2(6) = 30.949$; p-value < 0.001 (Table 7)) – **hypothesis supported**.

Table 5 Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.098^a	3	0.778
Likelihood Ratio	1.089	3	0.780
N of Valid Cases	157		

a. 1 cells (12.5%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.63.

Table 6 Evaluation of workations by Paretal status

		How are workations viewed by managers?				Total
		positive	rather positive	neither positive nor negative	critical	
5) How many children do you have?	None	30 (31.3 %)	23 (24 %)	6 (6.3 %)	37 (38.5 %)	96 (100 %)
	1	14 (42.4 %)	12 (36.4 %)	4 (12.1 %)	3 (9.1 %)	33 (100 %)
	2 or more	20 (74.1 %)	7 (25.9 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)	27 (100 %)
Total		64 (41 %)	42 (26.9 %)	10 (6.4 %)	40 (25.6 %)	156 (100 %)

Table 7 Chi-Square Test

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	30.949^a	6	0.000
Likelihood Ratio	38.291	6	0.000
N of Valid Cases	156		

a. 2 cells (16.7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.73.

H2: Managers' (very positive/positive) behaviours have an impact on the length of workations.

H2: With a growing positive attitude towards workations, the time that managers are willing to provide for workations increases statistically significantly (tested with Spearman correlation coefficient, $R = -0.616$; p-value < 0.001). There is a statistically significant relationship between workation rating and workation permission (χ^2 test of independence in cont. table; $\chi^2(6) = 190.088$; p-value < 0.001). It is logical that managers who are critical of workations will absolutely not allow it – **hypothesis supported**.

H3: Managers' perceptions of workations (positive/rather positive/critical) have an impact (positive/negative) on carrying out team workations.

H3: Those who are very satisfied with workations are also more satisfied with teamwork; those who are rather

satisfied are less satisfied with teamwork. It is therefore not surprising that there is a statistically significant relationship between the observed variables (χ^2 test of independence in the cont. table; $\chi^2(1) = 81.0$; p-value < 0.001) – **hypothesis supported**.

The table below (Table 8) shows that people who have already completed team workations rate it positively or very positively. These are people who overall evaluate workations positively or rather positively. As mentioned above, people who view workations negatively do not support workations and therefore cannot have team workations either. People who support workations have a positive attitude toward them and are also satisfied with team workations.

Table 8 Evaluation of workations by team spirit

		How did workforce feel about the team workations?					
		very positive		positive		Total	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
How are workations viewed by managers?	positive	49	100	0	0.0	49	60.5
	rather positive	0	0.0	32	100	32	39.5
	Total	49	100.0	32	100	81	100

H4: There is a relationship between the evaluation of workations and the evaluation of challenges that managers must solve with the theme of workations.

This hypothesis looked at the relationship between the workations assessment and the assessment of the challenges that managers have to solve with the workations system. From the above tables, we know that the most common ones are organization, legality and taxes.

However, the distribution of challenges is not statistically significantly different between ratings. From the point of view of the challenges that managers have to face during workations (Table 9), the distribution of challenges does not statistically significantly differ between workation evaluations (modified Fisher's exact test (p-value = 0.861)) – hypothesis not supported.

Table 9 Evaluation of workations by challenges

		How are workations viewed by managers?							
		positive		rather positive		neither positive nor negative		Total	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
What challenges do you see when organising a workation?	organisational	24	37.5	17	39.5	2	20.0	43	36.8
	legal	15	23.4	9	20.9	3	30.0	27	23.1
	taxes	13	20.3	7	16.3	3	30.0	23	19.7
	childcare	6	9.4	5	11.6	2	20.0	13	11.1
	data protection	6	9.4	5	11.6	0	0	11	9.4
	Total	64	100	43	100	10	100	117	100

5 Discussion

The findings of this study provide strong evidence that the workation works. The number of paid vacation days differs across European countries. In Austria, contracts allow 25 paid vacation days based on a 5-day working week [16]. As in Yoshida's study [10], the workationers in this study were employed, in our case managers. Thus, in this study, the workation is heavily influenced only by companies' intentions. Based on the data, 45.5% (81) of all managers were able to do workations compared with 34.3% (61 managers) who had no experience with it. This analysis supports the theory that the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that the impossible turns out to be possible [17]. Atkinson & Sandiford [18] highlight that organisations using flexible work options in recruitment practices attract a wider range of applicants. As shown by the data obtained, 65.5% (117) of managers would like to implement the workation in communication in recruiting.

A total of 49 (60.5%) out of 81 managers regarded team workations as very positive and 32 (39.5%) as positive. These results are in the vein of a qualitative study where the workationers see workations as the ideal way of working and living [19]. The greatest challenges of this flexible working approach according to managers (n=117) include: organisational (36.8%), legal (23.1%), taxes (19.7%), childcare (11.1%) and data protection (9.4%).

The situation is similar with general work flexibility challenges [20-22].

The majority of the 117 managers prefer less than one week (35.9%), almost three tenths would prefer 1-2 weeks and more than one sixth 3-4 weeks. Interestingly, few managers would prefer workations of over one month (11) and two or more months (7). Possible explanations may be that the hardest part of workations is the loneliness and lack of social interaction between team members. Interestingly, no general time span for a digital nomad has been set. Some perceive it as a temporary workation that ranges from two weeks to one year [23]. Digital technologies continuously enable a higher degree of flexibility and mobility [24,25], as demonstrated in this study. This means that the work location is less about what it is intended for but more about how the location is perceived to be used.

The three reasons why a workation works best, according to managers, are: 1) increase in job satisfaction (31.6%), 2) increase in productivity (29.1%) and 3) improved work-life balance (17.9%). This is comparable to the results of Beño [20]. As satisfaction in the workation increases, length increases. Further, the positive evaluation of team workations also increases.

Hernandez-Tamurejo et al. [26] highlighted the telework impact travel patterns as follows: frequency of days working remotely, commute distance and travel time.

Generally, it is the worst part of the workforce's day. Unlike working anywhere at any time or location-independence, the results seem to suggest that location is the first concern of managers in this study. As the number of children increases, the positive relationship with workations grows. It is interesting how the place seems to shape relationships as today's workplaces become more independent [27-29].

In accordance with Galinsky et al.'s [30] data and those in this study, we agree that "increased flexibility can make work 'work' for increasing numbers of employers, employees, employees' families, and communities".

6 Conclusions

The place where work can be conducted has changed considerably in recent years. Prior research has studied e-working topics within a physical work environment (on-site and/or at home). Thus, the underlying moved physical workplace (workation) is being left in the background and the workforce's experiences overlooked. The authors address the following research questions:

1. What is the status quo of the workation in Austria in times of multiple crises?

For managers, the workation means a recharging of the life batteries and working productively and efficiently at the same time. Organisations offering workations accept that their managers and workforce will be out of the office for a while. Most managers stay away for less than a week. Three reasons given by managers to explain why the workation is a success are: 1) an increase in job satisfaction, 2) an increase in productivity and 3) improved work-life balance.

- There is no statistically significant relationship between age and workation rating.
- There is no statistically significant relationship between workation rating and gender.
- The evaluation of workations does not depend on the highest level of education achieved.
- There is a statistically significant relationship between the workation rating and the number of children. It can be seen from the table and the graph that as the number of children increases, the positive relationship to workations grows.
- There is a relationship between the length of workations and the evaluation of workations. Persons critical of the workation (generally those who do not allow it at all) choose zero length workations. As satisfaction increases, length increases.
- There is a statistically significant relationship between workation rating and team workations rating. with increasing satisfaction with workations in general, and the positive evaluation of team workations also increases.

- From the point of view of the challenges that managers have to face during workations, the distribution of challenges does not statistically significantly differ between workation evaluations.

2. Can workations help employers retain workforce?

The majority of the 117 managers prefer less than one week (35.9%), almost three tenths would prefer 1-2 weeks and more than one sixth 3-4 weeks. Interestingly, few managers would prefer workations of over one month (11) and two or more months (7). This survey illustrates a possible way that organisations can retain the talent on their teams. But it comes down to personal preferences. A workation remains working hours and is only a win-win situation if enterprises create the necessary freedom and make them a voluntary option.

Human mobility data flow in this study provides an unprecedented opportunity to understand business executives' behaviour, preferences and trends, leading to informed decision making.

This study has some limitations. The main limitation is its novelty. Secondly, it was conducted solely in Austria with a cross-sectional research design. A longitudinal study could extend the current research. Thirdly, only a quantitative method for data collecting and analysis was employed. Further, a native language questionnaire, in this case German, allows the respondents to express themselves better, but may limit the interpretation when translated into English.

It can be assumed that the potential of workations has not yet been fully exploited. For this reason, there are other possibilities for future studies as well. We recommend longitudinal research to capture future developments for both employers and employees. A possible qualitative approach could analyse to what degree workations offer work-life balance and how this affects the overall desire to continue to go on workations.

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Working from abroad - workation as a mobility flow benefit

Michal Beno, Dagmar Caganova, Bohdana Bobinics

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Working from abroad - workation as a mobility flow benefit

Michal Beno, Dagmar Caganova, Bohdana Bobinics

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Review process

Single-blind peer review process.