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Abstract

Information seeking is one of the most central concepts in human information behavior studies. It is designed to provide explanation and meaning for purposeful and active information searches which are derived from a specific goal. Other thinkers defined information seeking simply as a deliberate and conscious effort to obtain information. The lack of methods and tools that support effective information management (IM) may lead to substantial damage to the ability to locate information in the organization. Frustration caused by poor search quality in workplaces was found to be a significant contributor to employee burnout.

Research Goal

The study sought to examine how much time the workforce spends searching for information they need for work, and how the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak affected the perception of this time.

Materials and Methods

The study focuses on organizations in the Israeli public sector, in keeping with our goal of studying information-intensive organizations. With the approval of the Civil Service Commission, 716 employees from four government offices of various sizes in Israel completed an online survey during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. The data were analyzed using standard statistical models by SPSS software.



Results

1. Estimation of Average Daily Information Search Times During COVID-19

The respondents were asked what their average daily search time is for information they need to fulfill their role in the organization since the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. According to the results, 67.18% of them testified that they spend up to half an hour on a daily basis (N=481), 22.34% reported that their information search lasted about an hour (N=160), while 10.47% stated that it takes them two hours or more to locate the information they search for (N=75). See Fig. 1.

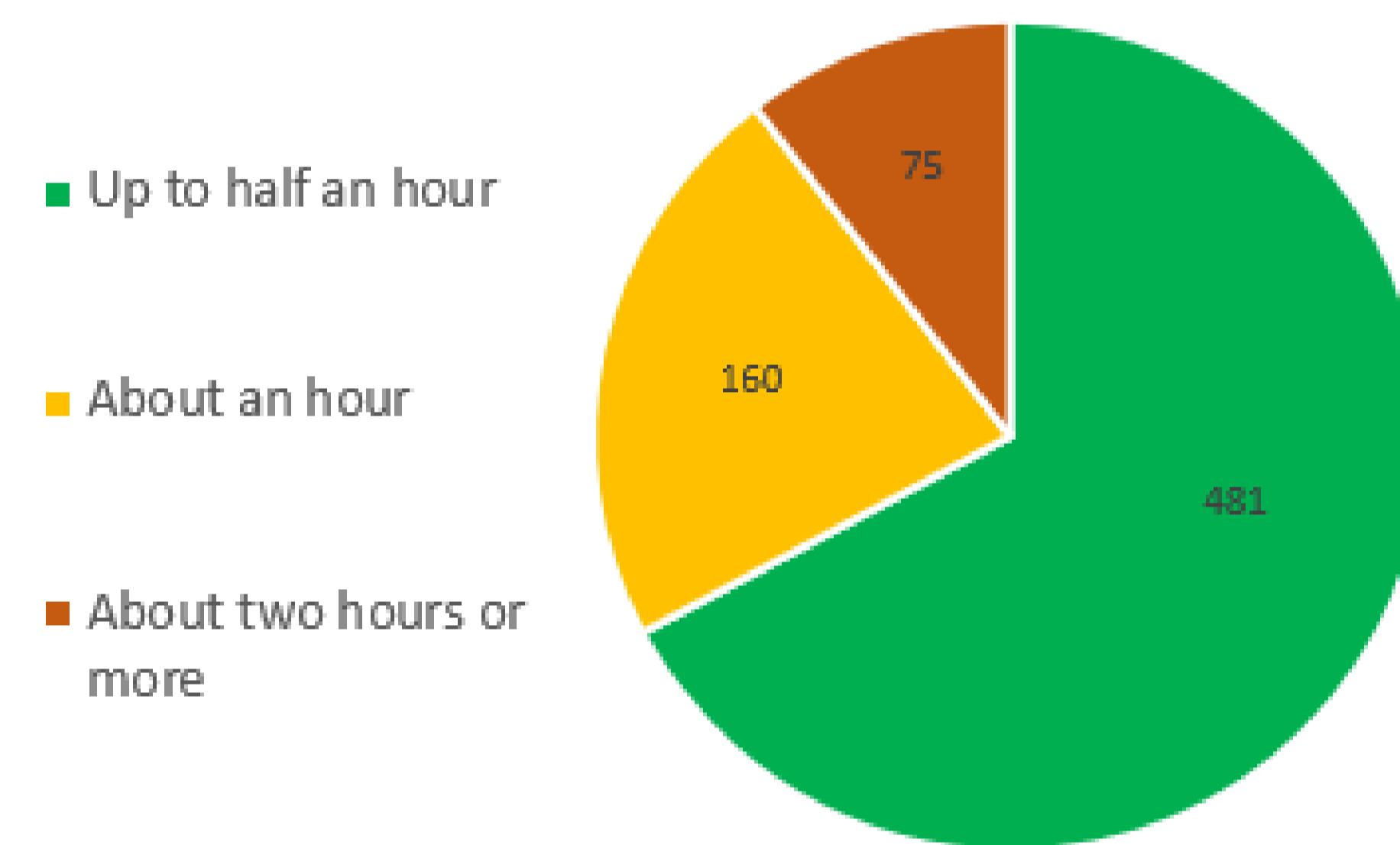


Fig. 1. The Average Daily Search Time During COVID-19

3. Information Search Time and IM Quality

We conducted a repeated measures ONEWAY ANOVA analysis to examine the influence of search time on the perception of IM quality. IM was defined as being high quality if it was reported that organizational information was fully documented, accessible, easily and quickly retrieved, high quality (up-to-date, complete, and relevant), and shared between co-workers. The results indicated a significant effect, $F(2,705)=13.84$, $p<.001$. Follow-up analysis revealed that IM quality improved significantly among respondents who reported that their search time was reduced upon the pandemic outbreak ($M=0.124$, $SD=0.48$). In contrast, IM quality deteriorated among respondents who reported lengthening search times ($M=-0.156$, $SD=0.49$). IM quality was maintained (i.e., the participants experienced no significant change) among those who reported that organizational information search time remained unchanged during COVID-19 ($M=-0.80$, $SD=0.40$) compared to pre-COVID-19 ($M= -0.01$, $SD=0.35$). See Fig. 3.

2. Perception of the Impact of COVID-19 on Search Time

Participants were asked to what extent they agree that the COVID-19 outbreak has increased information search time in their organization. An analytical examination of the results reveals that 31.42% of the respondents reported that they agree strongly (N=154) or completely agree (n=71). In contrast, 43.85% of respondents indicated that they agree slightly (N=127) or agree moderately (N=187). Of the respondents, 18.99% completely disagree (N=136), while 5.73% marked “Unknown/Irrelevant” (N=41). See Fig. 2.

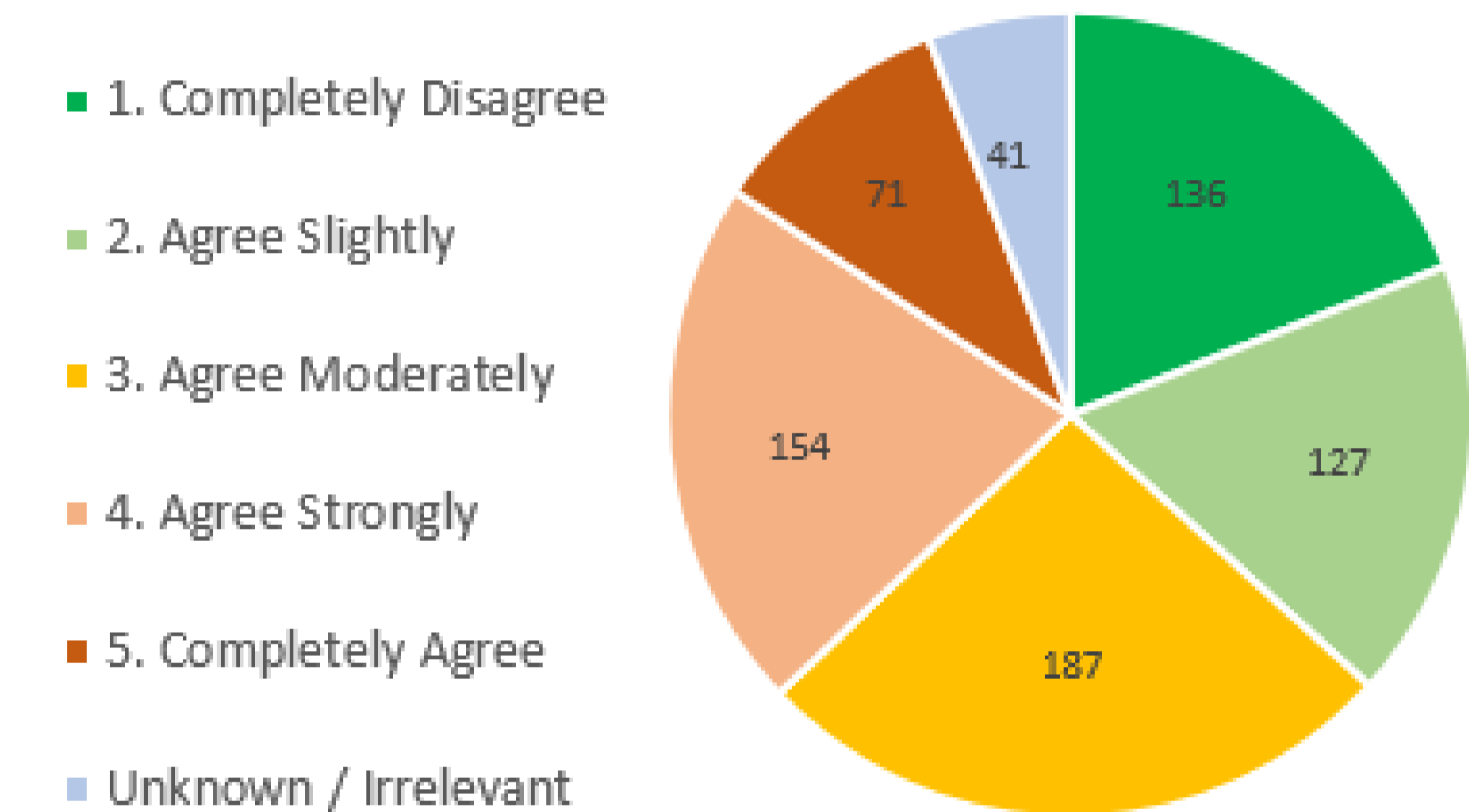


Fig. 2. The Perception of the Impact of COVID-19 on Search Time

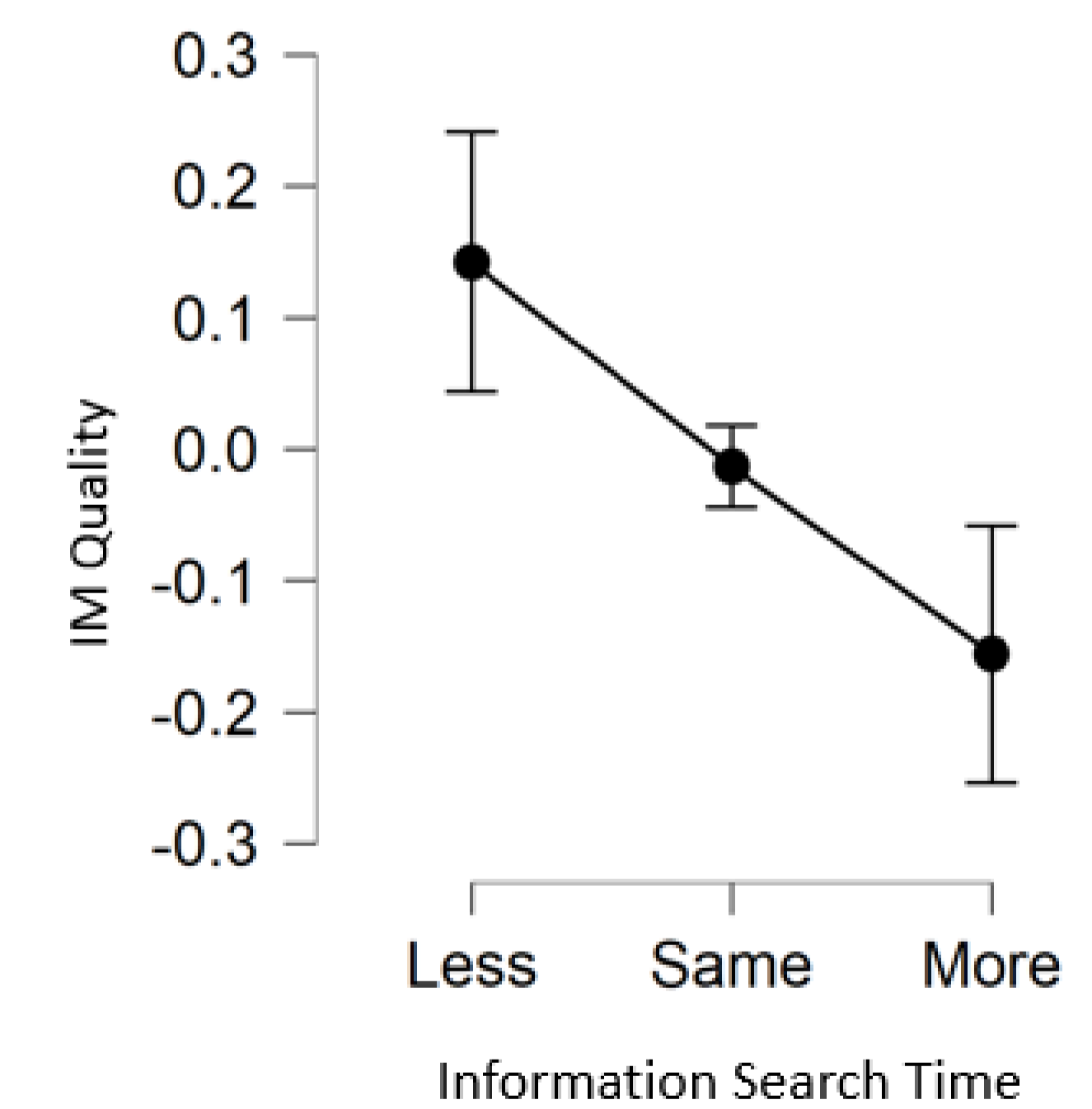


Fig. 3. The effects of the information search time on the perception of IM quality

Conclusions

One can hope that the results will raise the awareness of the technological experts in organizations as to the importance of the development of digital systems for speedy and effective information retrieval, which will support the minimization of search times and the maximization of IM performance. We believe more research is necessary surrounding factors which contribute to long search times. Furthermore, it is appropriate to examine in-depth efficient coherent strategies for minimizing search times in the digital work environment. We invite future researchers to join us in continuing the study of workforce information behavior even in the post-COVID-19 era. Findings in this field have the power to contribute to operational efficiency, improving organizational productivity, and employee well-being.