

Remote or In-person Work:

How does Personality and Qualifications Relate to Performance

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Abstract

After the COVID 19 pandemic forced many office workers to work remotely, many employers are now trying to bring their employees back to the office. However, many employees are resisting these calls, with claims that they can be equally, if not more productive while working remotely. Anecdotal evidence suggests that work performance can fluctuate in remote or in-person environments and from person to person. However, which environment generates better performance on average has not been well understood. In addition, whether there are differences in predictors of performance in remote vs. in-person settings is another under-researched area. Accordingly, acknowledging that this is an empirical question, this study will investigate work performance of individuals in remote or in-person work environments and attempt to explain why each person's work performance was inhibited or enhanced. The participants will be shown two different tasks and instructed to perform each task within both environments. Once participants complete their tasks, they will be invited to a survey measuring their personality and other potentially relevant constructs to explain the reasons they may have to perform better when doing remote work instead of in-person, or vice versa.

Introduction

Remote work can be defined as “working away from the conventional workplace through the use of computer-based technology.” (O’Neill et al., 2009). Before COVID, remote work was mostly reserved for specific circumstances such as if the same task can be performed remotely by workers in other countries to lower costs (e.g., call centers operating from India). However, during the pandemic and in the aftermath, remote work became applicable to most jobs which were previously performed in an office. During the Covid-19 pandemic, almost all organizations had to switch to some form of remote work. Now that restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic are lifting, managers are trying to bring people back into the office. They are concerned that when employees work from home, there is lack of oversight, productivity, creativity, and reduced communication. According to Sanders (2020), working from home more than 2.5 days a week could negatively impact relationships with their coworkers. This study also suggests that this lack of communication also decreases knowledge transfer which can negatively affect productivity. However, many employees are resisting this call to return to the office. According to McKinsey & Company (2022), 35% of Americans report on wanting to have the option of working remotely five days a week. In this study, we aim to understand how this increase in remote work has affected people’s productivity when working remotely versus working in the office.

Research on the relative effectiveness of remote work compared to in person work is in its infancy. Specifically, anecdotal evidence suggests some people perform better in person while others perform better remotely. However, what characteristics predict this performance difference is not well-understood. We aim to answer the question of which environment, in-office vs. remote, are employees more productive in this study by examining how personality

traits, state anxiety (during task), motivation, self-efficacy, off task cognition, self-regulatory processing, and other relevant constructs affect performance in remote vs. in-person work environments.

Method

Participants

The participants will include college students in the southeastern United States who are participating in the SONA research management system.

Procedure

Participants will complete a task both the in-person and remotely (with the order being counterbalanced). Tasks will consist of proofreading two texts with similar difficulty, and participants will be asked to find as many errors as possible in the reading within the time allotted. Accordingly, the measure of success will be the number of errors found within the given time. In person participants will be invited to the lab and given twenty minutes to complete the task. Remote participants will be invited to a Zoom meeting, but at the last minute will be told that being face to face is not necessary and they will be sent an email with instructions to complete the task instead. They will be given the same amount of time to complete the task as the in-person group and will be told to email their completed work by that time. After the task is complete, participants will be given a link to a survey which will evaluate personality on the HEXACO scale, state of anxiety during the task, motivation, self-efficacy, off task cognition, self-regulatory processing, and other relevant constructs.

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