

It's not that bad!

Perceived stress of knowledge workers during enforced working from home due to COVID-19

Jana Mattern, Simon Lansmann, Joschka Hüllmann



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Agenda



1

Motivation

2

Research Question & Research Model

3

Quantitative Results

4

Discussion

5

Conclusion

1) Motivation

What is Working From Home?



Working from Home (WFH) before the pandemic.

- Limited to certain employees, 22% of all employees used WFH in 2014 [1]
- Companies concerned about reduced productivity, limited willingness by managers
 - + WFH as **refugium** for uninterrupted work or ‘individual focus work’ [2]
 - Social isolation, ‘invisibility’, blurring boundaries and **increased stress**



Enforced Working from Home (EWFH) at the beginning of the pandemic.

- 33% of German employees worked from home in April 2020 [3]
- EFWH like an organisational intervention: not partly/voluntarily but fully/mandated
- Broad research interest
 - ‘Digitalisation and WFH in the Corona-Crisis’ [3] / ‘Fit4Homeoffice’ [4]
 - First results: employees feel **more productive** and **less stressed**
- We asked ourselves: Do the WFH results apply to EFWH?

2) Research Question & Research Model

Hypotheses



Research question.

“How does enforced working from home due to COVID-19 influence knowledge workers’ perceived stress?”

Research model.

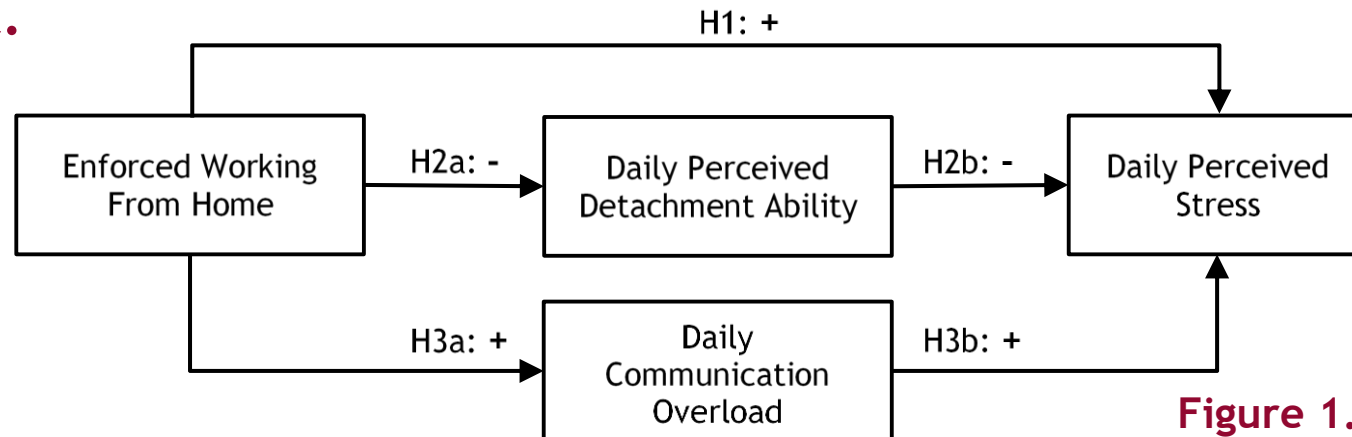


Figure 1.

3) Quantitative Results

What the Data is Telling us



Multi-level results.

Variable	Null Model			Predictor Model (H1)			Predictor model (H2b)			Predictor model (H3b)		
	Est.	SE	t	Est.	SE	t	Est.	SE	t	Est.	SE	t
Intercept (PS)	2.13	.095	22.318***	2.12	.077	27.571***	2.117	.075	28.251***	2.123	.076	27.946***
Sense of Coh.				-.40	.105	-3.764**	-.40	.101	-3.92***	-.397	.102	-3.879***
Attitude towards IT				-.227	.09	-2.62*	-.234	.084	-2.80**	-.229	.085	-2.700*
COVID-19 Worries				.27	.09	2.88**	.234	.097	2.423*	.274	.097	2.837**
EWFH				.015	.09	.16						
DetAb							-.123	.044	-2.820*			
ComOv										.033	.048	.701
-2x log	460.149			395.457			389.287			396.364		

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Figure 2.

Research model with results.

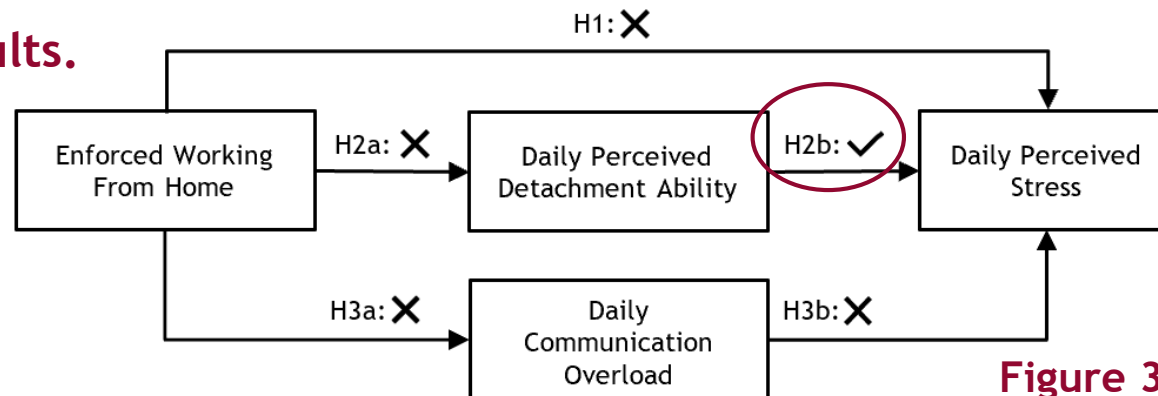


Figure 3.

4) Discussion

What we are Telling based on the Data



(1) Our participants do not experience high stress levels.

- Employees seem to have adapted rather swiftly to the new situation
- Dominant stressor: Taking care of young children, yet underrepresented in our sample
“WFH is ok if no kids are jumping around.”

(2) Our participants can detach.

- Participants reported that it was easier to stay mentally connected to work to *“quickly look things up”*
- Inability to detach increases stress, yet our participants reported they can



(3) Our participants do not experience communication overload.

- Growing email volumes reported as problematic (n=2)
- Back-to-back meeting episodes stressful but overall seldom mentioned
- In contrast: *“Somehow I’m looking forward to these meetings - no matter what the content is.”*

4) Discussion

What we are Telling based on the Data



(4) The 'refugium' (re)established.

- Number of meetings only grew modestly (60% 1-2 additional meetings, 32% more than 3 per week)
- Coordination overhead ('outeraction') as major reason for moderate increase of meetings
- Instead, participants reported they can engage in 'individual focus work'

"Today was an almost meeting-free day and the opportunity to concentrate on essays."

Limitations.

- Homogenous sample, research and teaching as main job profile (73%)
- University as employer, e.g. limited financial concerns
- EWFH ≠ WFH since all employees work from home
- No 'marginalisations' (e.g. power distance to office colleagues, lack of organisational support)



5) Conclusion

Summary and Outlook



“It’s not that bad”.

- Benefits seem to outweigh negative effects
- Participants are not stressed, they can detach and are not overloaded with electronic communication

The ‘Hybrid’ Future of Work.

- Potential benefits of a hybrid setting (WFH ~2 days per week)
 - Working from Office to engage in 'collaborative work' [5]
 - Working from Home to engage in 'individual focus work' [6]
- Good idea ... but reality is more complex. For example, interdependences will increase
 - How is work divided into team and individual (sub)tasks (**task structures**)?
 - How do family responsibilities influence the possibilities to WFH (**private structures**)?





Simon Lansmann

simon.lansmann@wi.uni-muenster.de

<https://www.smarter-work.de>

Department of Information Systems
Leonardo Campus 11, 48149 Münster



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