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Editorial: Implications of remote work on employee well-being and health

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Editorial on the Research Topic

Implications of remote work on employee well-being and health

Introduction

Employee health and wellbeing are crucial for organizations in regard to improved productivity, employee performance, job satisfaction, staff retention, reduced absenteeism, increased job satisfaction, and work commitment. Thus, research relating to employee health and wellbeing has produced some significant results and furthered our understanding of this subsection of the organizational psychology field. The evolution of the way we work has also gained traction in organizational psychology in relation to remote working. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, many employers have adapted to hybrid work, enabling their employees to partially telework. This is a huge shift in how we work as hybrid work has become the new standard—and many employees desire and expect to have this option.

When Frontiers invited us to organize a Research Topic to highlight the latest advancements on the implications of remote working for employee health, we were thrilled. When the call for papers was published, we received an overwhelming number of submissions, culminating in this Research Topic of 10 papers. We drafted the call in late 2022, and it was published in January 2023. Since then, much has changed and the field continues to evolve. [Vacchiano et al. \(2024\)](#) recently published a scoping review on hybrid work, summarizing findings from over 130 papers. Their review highlights the complexity of the issue. Hybrid work appears to balance reduced social interaction with increased flexibility for individual employees. Yet, much is unknown and [Vacchiano et al. \(2024\)](#) emphasize the need for more research into how telework interacts with employees' preferences, personalities, and life stages. They conclude that “a straightforward answer on the positive or negative effects of teleworking is neither useful nor necessary.”

The 10 papers included in this Research Topic are authored by a total of 34 researchers from various countries, including the Netherlands, Spain, Norway, Israel, and Germany, and they represent a range of institutions. These papers employ diverse methodologies, ranging from reviews and diary studies to expert group analyses and longitudinal studies with two or more measurement points and relatively large sample sizes. While we concur with [Vacchiano et al. \(2024\)](#) that simple answers are elusive, we believe the contributions in this Research Topic reflect the complexity of the subject and, collectively, offer valuable insights.

Overview of the Research Topic articles

Castro-Trancón et al. present a systematic review of 37 studies examining the effects of teleworking on wellbeing from a gender perspective. Their findings show that 10 studies report positive effects of telework, while five papers highlight both positive and negative effects on wellbeing. However, the majority—22 of the reviewed studies—indicate a negative impact of telework on work-family interaction and work-family balance. As expected, the studies reveal stronger negative effects for women, with women teleworkers experiencing lower job and life satisfaction, as well as increased work-family conflict.

Baum and Rau explored the interaction between teleworking and job autonomy to determine when workplace flexibility can help balance work and private life. Experienced occupational psychologists analyzed various workplaces within an organization across an entire shift using a task-related instrument, focusing particularly on autonomy in terms of task content and scheduling. They then surveyed 110 employees, assessing their use of telework, perceived job demands, and work-family conflict. The results indicate that teleworking is associated with a reduction in work-family conflict, particularly for individuals with limited autonomy at work.

Kunz et al. conducted a five-day diary study involving two daily surveys, examining the effects of continuing work tasks and being contacted by supervisors or colleagues after official working hours. Results from a multilevel path analysis revealed that a more positive appraisal of technology-assisted supplemental work (TASW) was associated with increased work engagement. However, positive appraisal of TASW events was not linked to psychological detachment, suggesting that while employees may feel more engaged, they may struggle to fully disconnect from work.

Rigotti et al. examined differential effects of social challenge and hindrance stressors depending on the work location in a 10-day diary study. The relationship between these stressors and exhaustion was moderated by the work location. The positive link between challenge-oriented social stressors and exhaustion occurred only on days spent teleworking, while social hindrance stressors were positively associated with exhaustion exclusively on days spent working at the employer's premises. Interestingly, the absolute level of social stressors did not differ between the two locations. Their findings suggest that mainly the impact of specific stressors may vary depending on the physical work location.

Krick et al. conducted a longitudinal study with over 700 employees to explore SelfCare in the telework context. SelfCare, a part of the Health-Oriented Leadership model, involves prioritizing health, recognizing stress, and promoting wellbeing. Results showed that SelfCare is more prevalent when teleworking. Higher telework intensity was associated with reduced strain, fewer health complaints, and improved relaxation and performance through enhanced SelfCare. Both SelfCare at home and on-site predicted strain and health complaints, with a notable interaction effect on strain. These findings highlight the importance of SelfCare in telework, suggesting organizations should implement continuous support tools for employees and leaders.

Picker-Roesch et al. conducted online surveys with over 1,000 employees at three measurement points between 2020 and 2022. They found significant differences for six out of seven psychosocial risk factors, including social relationships with supervisors and colleagues, with work intensity being the only factor unchanged. The study also revealed challenges for teleworking parents while caring for children, leading to decreased work continuity compared to those without childcare responsibilities. While teleworking can reduce job stressors in the long term, it relies on strong social support, especially for full-time remote workers. Parents with childcare duties need additional support to manage their unique challenges in a remote work setting.

Sedefoglu et al. studied how leadership behavior affects employee work engagement during remote work in a crisis, focusing on "consideration" as a leadership dimension. They also explored optimism as a potential mediator. The study involved 729 employees in a three-wave study conducted over 6 weeks in 2020. Longitudinal analysis showed that considerate leadership positively influenced changes in work engagement between the second and third measurement points, but optimism did not mediate this effect. The findings highlight the critical role of leadership in enhancing employee motivation and wellbeing during remote work and crises.

Birman et al. examined how job crafting affected changes in employee engagement following an abrupt shift to remote work using a three-wave longitudinal study. Data collected via Amazon Turk during the first 3 months of the pandemic revealed that high levels of approach-oriented job crafting, such as increasing challenging demands, negatively impacted employees' ability to maintain engagement over time. The study found a decline in engagement over the study period, with increasing challenging demands exacerbating this decrease. The results suggest that approach-oriented job crafting added unnecessary workload and depleted resources, worsening engagement. This research highlights that such job crafting strategies were counterproductive during the pandemic.

Bendixen and Scheel showed in two online surveys during different stages of the COVID-19 pandemic (November 2020 and November 2021) that work intensification was positively related to both procrastination and irritation. In one survey, the extent of teleworking amplified the link between work intensification and procrastination, but only for those without a dedicated home workspace. Unexpectedly, social support did not moderate these effects. This research highlights the downsides of remote work, revealing that work intensification can increase irritation and procrastination, which negatively impacts wellbeing and task performance.

Fostervold et al. studied how the number of telework days affected employee loneliness during and 2 years after the COVID-19 lockdown, focusing on role overload as a mediator and social support as a moderator. Data were collected from almost 7,000 participants in January 2021 and January 2023. More telework days were linked to increased loneliness during the lockdown, with this effect decreasing afterward. Role overload mediated this relationship, worsening loneliness during telework but having less impact post-lockdown. Interestingly, while higher social support usually reduced role overload and loneliness, it paradoxically intensified these issues for those with extensive telework. The study

highlights that telework can lead to greater loneliness and role overload, particularly during lockdowns, and that substantial social support may not fully mitigate these challenges.

Together, these studies paint a nuanced picture of the benefits and risks of remote work and potential boundary conditions, paving the way for successful work design that is tailored to the modern workforce. However, some results are pandemic-specific and need to be validated under post-pandemic conditions.

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RvD: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. AB: Writing – review & editing. NJ: Writing – review & editing.

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Reference

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