

# Literature Review: Predictors of Working from Home Success

## Introduction

Businesses are facing unprecedented challenges as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. One of these challenges is the move of staff from primarily office/onsite locations to a predominantly remotely located workforce.

While there are clear logistical challenges that this can raise there are also issues around the compatibility of an employee's psychological makeup with working solely from home. To help organisations understand the likelihood that an employee will thrive in a work from home environment SACS has created a psychological testing instrument to assess this.

The assessment is based on the current findings of organisational psychology research related to characteristics which indicate that a person is:

- ◆ Likely to be able to work from home with high levels of wellbeing
- ◆ Likely to perform their job well under these circumstances

## Wellbeing Factors

An important predictor of success when working remotely is the ability for the worker to maintain a healthy mental state. A key predictor of wellbeing when working from home is the personality factor of Emotionality. People with high scores on emotionality tend to be emotionally unstable whereas those with low scores tend to be emotionally stable and resilient.

Research indicates that:

- ◆ Having a high score in Emotionality is not favourable as it suggests that a person may be more likely to be irritated, angry or anxious and may need additional support when dealing with difficult situations (O'Neill, Hambley, & Chatellier, 2014). This poses a challenge when working remotely as there may be less opportunities to receive support from colleagues or managers when they feel stressed with their work or their home situation.

Another element of personality which is relevant to wellbeing is Extraversion which indicates how likely a person is to be outgoing, friendly and happy to work in environments with high levels of social interaction (Smith, Patmos & Pitts, 2018).

In respect of remote work, research indicates that:

- ◆ Individuals very high in Extraversion are likely to be disadvantaged by working in isolation as it often severely limits opportunities for interactions with colleagues and may lead to negative attitudes and a reduction in wellbeing (Clark, Karau & Michalisin, 2012).

Emotionally stable introverts are perhaps best suited for well-being point of view to working remotely. Emotionally unstable extroverts are perhaps in the worst case from a psychological health point of view as their remoteness is likely to engender distress for which they already have a predisposition. Screening staff for their levels of Emotionality and Extraversion is therefore highly advisable.

## Performance Factors

There are positive and negative aspects of performance for employees:

- ◆ Will the person perform the job role effectively?
- ◆ How likely is it that the person will undertake counter-productive work behaviours against the organisation given there is no direct supervision? This includes negative behaviours such as discretionary absenteeism, or “cyberslacking”, where the person pretends to be working but in the absence of a supervisory eye is instead being dishonest and participating in non-work related activities such as web surfing, online shopping or gaming (O’Neill, Hambley & Chantellier, 2014).

The psychological characteristic of Honesty/Humility is a very strong indicator of an individual’s likelihood of doing the right thing by the organisation and colleagues or other stakeholders. People who are high in Honesty/Humility tend to be trustworthy, honest, direct and lacking in arrogance (Ashton, Lee & de Vries, 2014). People who are high in this characteristic tend to have an internal commitment to and awareness of what is right or wrong and a discomfort with acts which they feel compromise their moral position. For this reason they can be relied on more heavily not to undertake negative behaviours even when they are not being scrutinised.

In a study by O’Neill et al., (2014) it was highlighted that employees high in honesty are likely to be more effective when working from home as they are more likely to work well without the close proximity of colleagues and supervisors. This suggests that there is a greater likelihood that remote workers will be more effective if they are high Honesty-Humility.

A risk faced when having employees work with reduced supervision is that people who are already more predisposed to engage in counterproductive work behaviours will be more likely to engage in negative behaviours such as cyberslacking when working remotely (O’Neill, Hambley & Bercovich, 2014; O’Neill et al., 2014). As a result, it is important to screen candidates to reduce the risk of hiring people who are more likely to engage in negative behaviours at work both on an interpersonal level and also at an organisational one.

Another indicator of the likelihood of continuing to perform in the absence of supervision as well as providing a lower likelihood of negative behaviours is the personality characteristic of Conscientiousness. Individuals high in Conscientiousness tend to be well-organised, committed, energetic and self disciplined. Studies indicate (e.g., Smith, Patmos & Pitts 2018) a positive relationship between job satisfaction and conscientiousness when working from home, and that this tends to lead to sound performance levels. Conscientious people's tendency to be organised, diligent and independent reduces the likelihood of procrastination in the absence of supervision.

Further indicator is the personality factor Agreeableness – the tendency to be approachable and easy to relate to rather than cranky and difficult. Various studies have indicated that this factor is positively related to job performance , including when working remotely as persons high in this characteristic are more likely to find a healthy balance of meeting the needs of their colleagues and also those sharing their home environment (Clark, Karau & Michalisin, 2012).

The value of Self Direction is also an indicator of likely work performance in remote work. People high in this value tend to believe that it is important that they make their own decisions and act independently. A study by O'Neill, Hambley, & Chatellier (2009), showed that people who had a higher personal inclination to autonomy in the work that they do achieved higher levels of telework performance. As a result, ideal candidates with higher levels of self-direction will be more likely to operate independently and productively.

Intelligence is another predictor of success when working from home. Intelligence has been linked with the ability to learn new things quickly (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998), suggesting that those with stronger scores on their cognitive tests will be more likely to adopt the new skills and strategies needed to perform effectively while transitioning to working from home. A study by Wainwright et al., (2008) also highlighted that cognitive ability is linked with higher levels of openness to experience, suggesting that people with a higher IQ will be more likely to be willing to adopt the new working arrangements quickly and effectively.

## Conclusion

Remote working is a style of work which has steadily been growing due to evolving work practices. Due to coronavirus this trend has been explosively accelerated. The SACS Remote Working Assessment is an instrument designed to identify whether people have the intrinsic characteristics to indicate that they are personally suited to such a work environment and that they will perform in this setting.

## References

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