

From home office to onsite work: Understanding employees' workplace choices after the Covid-19 pandemic

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Bachelor of Science

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Purpose/Motivation: During the Covid-19 pandemic, working from home was not a voluntary decision of employees, but rather a consequence of governmental measures to prevent the spread of the virus (Kurdy et al., 2023). Nevertheless, this novel form of work arrangement was found to provide advantages for both organisations and employees (Bal & Bulgur, 2023), which is why numerous organisations have continued to offer remote work opportunities following the extreme circumstances during the pandemic (Errichiello & Pianese, 2021). However, the existing literature has focused mainly on the situation during the pandemic (e.g. Adisa et al., 2022; De Vincenzi et al., 2022; Kurdy et al., 2023) and, consequently, aspects of the contemporary situation, such as employees' preferences regarding their place of work and the concept of hybrid working, have been neglected.

Theories/Hypotheses: The thesis aims to explore what conditions and experiences drive employees' decisions to return to onsite work or to remain in a remote work setting after the Covid-19 pandemic. In this context, drivers such as the integration of work-life and private life, in-person interaction and performance are of special interest in understanding employees' workplace choice. Furthermore, the thesis considers various factors that may either enhance or diminish the aforementioned impacts on the workplace decision.

Approach/Methodology: The method that is used to answer the research question is known as the abductive research approach. This extends boundary theory (Ashforth et al., 2000), social presence theory (Gunawardena, 1995; Short et al., 1976), social exchange theory (SET) (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1958) and job crafting (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001) with the findings of 12 semi-structured, qualitative interviews. The data obtained from these interviews provides the foundation for the formulation of new hypotheses that further integrate existing theoretical frameworks and findings from the previous literature on the pandemic.

Findings: The thesis proposes a moderated model.

Proposition 1: The experience of boundary blurring when working from home results in the employee's choice to return to onsite work after the pandemic.

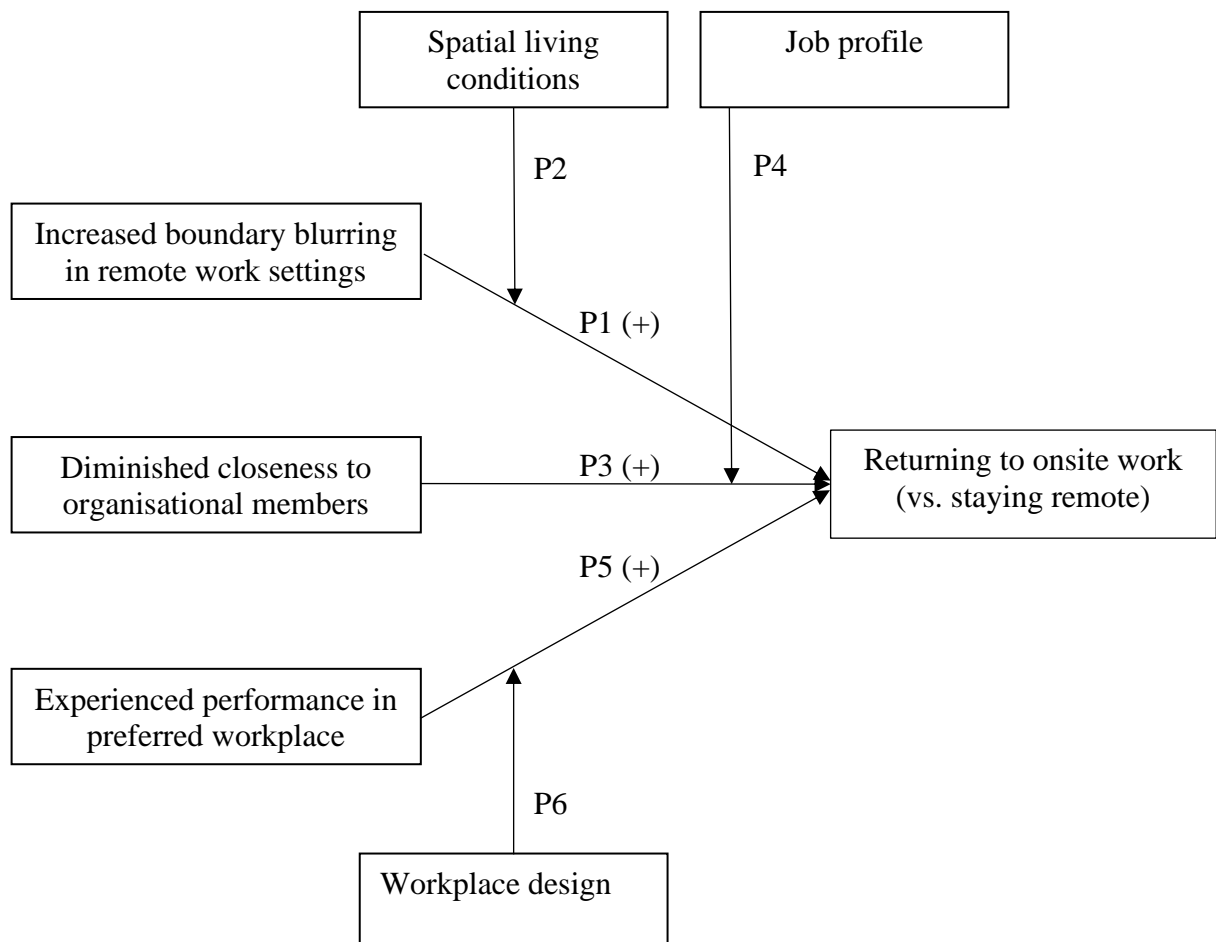
Proposition 2: The spatial living conditions moderate the relationship between perceived boundary blurring and the employee's workplace choice.

Proposition 3: The diminished closeness to organisational members when working from home results in the employee's choice to return to onsite work.

Proposition 4: The job profile moderates the relationship between the diminished closeness to organisational members and the employee's workplace choice.

Proposition 5: The experienced performance when working from home and in the office leads to the choice of the workplace where the individual performance is highest.

Proposition 6: The workplace design moderates the relationship between the experienced performance in the preferred workplace and the employee's workplace choice.



Research Limitations: First, the small sample size of twelve interviewees must not be overlooked, since this induces a reduced explanatory power of the findings. Second, two-thirds of the interviewees were over the age of 45, meaning the perspective of younger workers, who may have a different point of view, was under-represented here.

Third, the sample included only four women, which makes it difficult to examine gender-specific characteristics that may be particularly relevant to the issue of boundary blurring, as discussed by Kossek et al. (2021).

Research Implications: More attention should be directed towards the aspect of experienced closeness to organisational members in remote work arrangements, as this was mentioned by all those interviewed as a problem when working remotely.

Practical Implications: As the results showed, managers should be aware that performance is strongly linked to the employee's workplace and work environment. Therefore, from an employer's point of view, it would be counterproductive to force employees into a particular working context in which they experience a reduced sense of wellbeing which leads to a lower level of performance. On top of that, face-to-face interaction was considered the most important aspect by almost all interviewees. It can be concluded that managers will have to deal with the trade-off between allowing employees to freely choose their workplace according to where they feel most comfortable and are most productive but, at the same time, manage to avoid the "Monday-Friday problem". This refers to the situation where it is difficult to ensure that members from the same department are onsite on the same days of the week.

Contribution: The thesis investigates the reasons for employees' decisions regarding their work arrangements. Given that many companies are facing the question of how to shape remote work in the post-pandemic era, this topic continues to be highly relevant. By grasping the rationale behind the selection of either a remote work setting or onsite work, firms may be able to influence these drivers depending on whether the organisation wishes to promote remote work or bring employees back into the office.

Paper type: conceptual

Further readings:

- Kossek, E. E., Dumas, T. L., Piszczek, M. M., & Allen, T. D. (2021). Pushing the Boundaries: A Qualitative Study of How Stem Women Adapted to Disrupted Work–Nonwork Boundaries During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 106(11), 1615–1629. <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000982>
- Rockmann, K. W., & Pratt, M. G. (2015). Contagious Offsite Work and the Lonely Office: The Unintended Consequences of Distributed Work. *Academy of Management Discoveries*, 1(2), 150–164.