

Data-Driven Insights into Attitudes about Working from Home

The unexpected arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic has brought the whole world to a halt, causing disruptions to the global economy as well as professional and personal lives of billions of people. Whether due to imposed country-wide lockdowns or voluntary self-isolation and social distancing, thousands of workers found themselves working from home.

While some initially welcomed the lack of commute and the ability to take meetings from their living room, others have experienced their new-found reality as unsettling and cumbersome. The different reactions have stemmed to a large extent from the interplay between one's personal circumstances, line of work, as well as differences in the individual traits that have predisposed individuals to different levels of comfort with the home office. In an attempt to better understand why differences exist among the myriad working from home attitudes, pymetrics collected survey and gameplay data from professionals across a number of industries in order to support workers and their organizations in these unprecedented times.

According to the recent [study](#) conducted by pymetrics, the levels of satisfaction with the new work from home routine vary to a certain extent depending on the individuals' line of work. It is perhaps not surprising that out of the respondents from the Technology sector, 70% responded in affirmative to the question, "Do you like working from home?", whereas opinions were more equally split for those working in Government and Legal roles. What appeared to be a persistent trend across all industries, however, is that the majority of respondents expressed a positive attitude toward working from home.

Out of those currently working from home who have not done so prior to the social distancing restrictions, 61% admitted they enjoy the new arrangement. In comparison, 80% of the individuals who had worked from home prior to the current lockdown reported enjoying their home office. There could be a number of reasons for this discrepancy – from the nature of one’s job, self-selection into roles that allow flexible working arrangements, personal and family circumstances or something as simple as having a comfortable home office set up and technology enabling one to work from home just as effectively as they would have from the company office. The research on personality and cognitive factors further points towards the impact these individual differences have on our preferred ways of working.

To better understand the impact of individual differences on the attitude towards working from home, pymetrics invited the survey respondents to complete a series of gamified assessments derived from decades of research in cognitive neuroscience. The gameplay information collected provided thousands of behavioral data points, which for the ease of interpretation, have been collated into 9 core socio-cognitive factors as presented below:



Decision Making

Approach to making decisions
(deliberative/instinctive)



Generosity

Tendency to prioritize the needs
of others above your own
(sharing/frugal)



Risk Tolerance

Comfort with risk-taking
(adventurous/cautious)



Learning

Tendency to change behavior
based on new information
(adaptive/consistent)



Focus

Concentration style for one
or more tasks
(focused/multi-tasking)



Emotion

Strategy for interpreting
others’ emotions
(expression-oriented/context oriented)



Effort

Effort invested based on size of
reward and probability of success
(hard working/outcome-driven)



Fairness

Perception of the fairness
of social solutions
(accepting/critical)



Attention

Approach to managing incoming
information and distractions
(methodical/biased towards action)

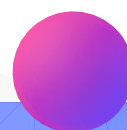


Focus

The research conducted by pymetrics revealed that one of the main factors affecting someone's comfort with working from home is **Focus**, which refers to a person's concentration style. Those scoring towards the "focused" end of the spectrum tend to work best when they are able to concentrate on a single task and effectively tune-out distractions, whereas individuals whose scores are in the "multi-tasking" direction are more likely to prefer working in a dynamic manner where they can switch from one task to another.

Working from home can be seen by the more "focused" individuals as an opportunity to be more productive as they can work on planned tasks for prolonged periods of time without being interrupted by co-workers. This can however sometimes come with a risk. Given "focused" individuals tend to concentrate on one task at a time, they may fail to regularly check incoming emails or notifications sent via instant messenger and therefore miss additional information or a change in the course of day-to-day action. To avoid duplication of work and minimize possible frustration from colleagues who may be waiting for a reply, it is worthwhile agreeing with others in the team on the means of communication in case of urgent changes the person needs to be aware of - it is certainly likely at least one member of the team is more "focused." For example, should a change in priorities or timelines take place, a phone call can be agreed on beforehand as the preferred means of communication, while for any other non-urgent communication, the team should might agree to continue using email, Skype, or a direct messaging platform as established through standard practice within the organization, recognising that there may be a delay in responding. In addition, "focused" individuals may find it beneficial to block out times in their calendar when they are planning to work on items that require more concentration and communicate to the team that they will be checking and responding to any messages only between these times.

On the other hand, those with preference for "multi-tasking" are likely to become increasingly distracted when having to work on a single task for an extended period of time, and should thus try to incorporate regular breaks or divide the task into smaller actionable items that they can weave into with other activities. In addition, since Extroverts are more likely to display multi-tasking behaviors (as supported by research on the Big 5 Personality traits and their correspondence to the pymetrics factors), they may especially benefit from scheduling regular calls or having informal chats with their team while working on a task to keep themselves engaged through social interactions.



It is important that they check with their colleagues to ensure they are not interrupting the work of more “focused” team members and that their multi-tasking is not compromising the effectiveness of their work. According to recent studies, shifting between tasks and goals can be detrimental to one’s productivity due to the increased cognitive effort of switching one’s attention. Due to the links to extroversion as well as preference to work in more fast-paced, dynamic environments, “multi-taskers” may be more likely to struggle with the new-found reality, especially if their industry is experiencing significant reduction in business.

Attention

Working from home can be both a blessing and a curse, depending on the alignment between one’s preferred ways of working and the organizational expectations. Another factor that is significant for consideration in this context is **Attention**. This factor measures a person’s response to incoming information and distractions. Individuals on the “methodical” end of the spectrum tend to be more thorough and restrained, predering accuracy over speed in order to avoid mistakes. Those scoring towards the “biased towards action” direction, are more likely to react quickly and be open to new information outside of the immediate task and are not easily flustered by mistakes.

On one hand, like individuals who are “focused,” “methodical” individuals often recognize that working from home offers an environment in which they have more control over the incoming interruptions and therefore can manage their focus more effectively. However, they can easily feel overwhelmed if, despite physical distance, they continue being contacted by their coworkers via email, Skype, internal communicators such as Slack or Yammer, or receive unexpected calls while they are deeply focused on a task. These interruptions are most likely to come from multi-taskers, especially if they also score towards the “biased to action” end of the attention spectrum and as a result may be more inclined to quickly react to the new inputs. This can lead to tensions in the workplace, especially since the impromptu chats are often used by extroverts as means of keeping in touch with others and ensuring the interpersonal communication which they find energising and essential for maintaining high work engagement. To avoid conflict, it may be beneficial for a team to have a facilitated conversation on the preferred ways of working to avoid any misunderstandings. It is also worth acknowledging the personal circumstances that the employees are currently facing, as sharing working space with one’s family may call for a greater degree of flexibility and adjustment, and may be causing additional stress, especially for those with a more methodical and focused style if they are facing interruptions from those they share their space with.

Emotion

Another pymetrics factor associated with both working from home preferences and the extraversion trait is **Emotion**. This factor measures the strategy one adopts to understand other people's feelings. According to the survey we conducted, those who tend to rely more on facial-expressions rather than contextual information report greater dislike for working from home, most likely due to the reduced interpersonal interactions and the virtual communication not always providing sufficient cues regarding other people's moods. Although using the video function on Zoom or Skype when speaking to colleagues and opting for gallery view in order to see all video participants can help, the overall interactions are more likely to rely on written forms of communication which can easily create opportunities for misunderstandings due to insufficient information regarding one's tone of voice, among other non-verbal cues.

In the light of the recently coined term "Zoom fatigue" it is important to ensure that we are leveraging technology in a way that can support us rather than drain us. It is therefore beneficial for organizations and team leaders to encourage honesty and transparency to ensure everyone feels comfortable with the new channels of communication, as well as the frequency and length of the meetings. By role-modelling positive behaviors and acknowledging that the current work from home set-up may include children or partners of the employees in the background, leaders can help to diminish their teams' discomfort with video conferencing.

With emotion being also correlated to the Big 5 traits of openness, conscientiousness and agreeableness, individuals who are context-oriented are also more likely to score higher on these traits, making them more likely to be open to new circumstances, curious about trying new ways of working and more likely to follow the new rules in a disciplined manner. Although the individuals oriented more towards context are less likely to dislike working from home, it is still important for them to ensure they maintain informal conversations with their team members so their assumptions regarding the contextual information can be verified and are not just based on the extrapolation from their own feelings and that they remain mindful of others finding the current circumstances more challenging.

Stress

In addition to the extent of comfort with working from home, pymetrics' [survey](#) also asked about the current **Stress** levels experienced in relation to Covid-19. The results revealed that 63% of the respondents feel moderate to high levels of stress associated with the current global situation and the financial uncertainty and health threats it brings. A likely contributor to the stress levels is the uncertainty associated with how long the pandemic-induced new reality will persist. Taking into consideration that while some may adapt further to the new routine as the time passes, others are likely to descend into a less favorable attitude towards it once the novelty of the situation wears off. This can in turn be also exacerbated by scores on risk-tolerance, which looks at one's level of comfort with uncertainty. While the current situation is likely to be stressful overall, individuals who are more cautious and risk-averse may find it more overwhelming than the more adventurous types. Those scoring towards the cautious end of the spectrum may benefit from reframing the current situation in a more positive way, e.g. focusing on the positives of working from home and highlighting the aspects of their everyday reality that are still unchanged or within their control. Adventurous types may find that focusing on the new opportunities that the current situation brings can support their adjustment to the new reality.

While we have little control over the measures taken to stop the spread of the virus, we can leverage the knowledge of organizational psychology and the power of data to help us understand what we can do in order to support ourselves and others around us to thrive in this new normal. By understanding our own individual behavioral dynamics, in addition to those of the people we live and work with, we are able to be conscientious in the way we interact both personally and professionally during this unprecedented situation. This type of objective data will help individuals and organizations continue to adapt over the course of the coming months as the "new normal" gradually becomes clear.

pymetrics is a talent matching platform that makes workforce decisions more efficient, accurate, and fair. We use behavioral science-backed games to measure the cognitive, social, and emotional attributes of individuals and a data-driven approach to match them with the right opportunity - based on their potential, not their pedigree. Our ethical and audited AI-powered insights and recommendations equip employers with accurate and actionable information to manage the entire talent lifecycle, from hiring to internal mobility and beyond.