

Factors Affecting the Desire to Work from Home Post-Pandemic

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Abstract

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, working from home was a volitional activity that most employees opted into. During the pandemic, employees transitioned to working from home with little warning, and now, many companies are planning to continue to have employees work from home (WFH). The purpose of this study is to identify the variables associated with an employee's desire to continue to WFH after the pandemic. For this study, predictors were organized into the following three categories: individual strategies, organizational strategies (e.g., organizational policies), and reactions to WFH experiences. We predicted that individual strategies (e.g., preparation) and organizational strategies (e.g., supervisor support) would be positively related to the desire to WFH while adverse reactions experienced when forced to WFH (e.g., burnout) would be negatively related to the desire to WFH. Using survey data from 1217 employees at the beginning of the pandemic and around 400 of the same employees two months later, predictor variables were correlated with employee's desire to WFH. One individual strategy, multiple organizational strategies, and one well-being oriented outcome significantly correlated with the desire to WFH. Future research is needed to determine how well these correlates of the desire to WFH actually predict who does WFH in the future and their success in doing so.

Introduction

- There has been considerable research on employees who work from home (WFH) which is often called teleworking or telecommuting (Allen et al., 20015).
- Although there are various definitions, most of the time WFH is discretionary---the employee's choice---assuming the organization and supervisor permit it.
- A few studies have examined the "desire to" WFH (e.g., Haddad et al., 2009).
- Mokhtarian & Solomon (2009) proposed that work-related factors are the most important when it comes to predicting an employee's choice, or desire, to WFH.
- Some research suggests that supportive leadership and diversity management can reduce non-participation of employees who are willing and able to WFH (Bae et al., 2019).

Method

- A snowball sampling technique was used to identify people who worked from home during the pandemic.
- Around 1200 individuals completed the first survey April 2020 (Time 1).
- Time 1 (T1) participants were 1,216 employed individuals ranging in age from 18 to 73 years ($M = 37.27$, $SD = 11.70$). The sample was predominantly White/Caucasian (83%) and the majority of the respondents were women (66%), married (58%), and had a Bachelor's degree or higher (80%).
- 2 months later, approximately 400 of the same individuals completed the second survey (Time 2).
- A majority of the variables were measured with previously validated measures from literature.
- Hypotheses were tested using correlations.

Results

- Supported
- Not Supported

Predictor Variable	Correlation Coefficient
Organizational Strategies	
T1- Flexible Work Place	.25
T1 - Telework Training	.14
T1 - Supervisor Support	.19
T1 - Supervisor Trust	.00
T1 - Flexible Work Time	.12

Predictor Variable	Correlation Coefficient
Individual Strategies	
T2 - Work/Life Balance	-0.01
T1 - Regular Communication	.09
T1 - Making Oneself Available	.15

Predictor Variable	Correlation Coefficient
Reactions to Pandemic WFH	
T1 - Telepressure	.00
T2 - Telepressure	.06
T2 - Burnout	-.09
T2 - Physical Health	.14
T2 - Mental Health	.07

Hypotheses

Individual Strategies

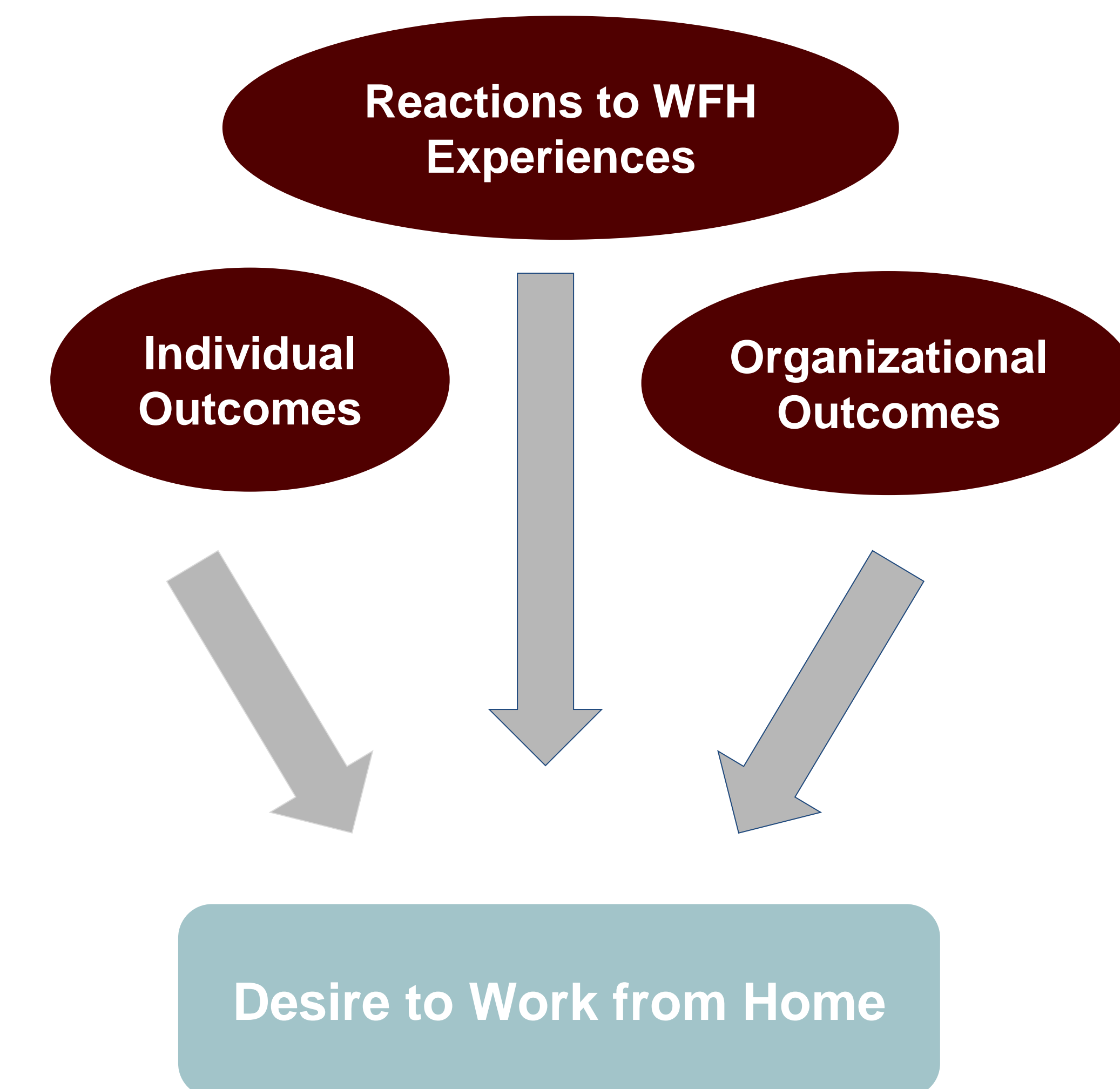
- H1: Employees who engage in strategies to separate work from nonwork are more likely to want to WFH in the future.
- H2: Employees who maintain regular levels of communication with their supervisors and colleagues during the pandemic will be more likely to want to WFH in the future.
- H3: Employees who make themselves more available will be more likely to want to WFH in the future.

Organizational Strategies

- H4: Employees who work for organizations that offered (a) WFH training and (b) opportunities to WFH before the pandemic are more likely to want to WFH in the future.
- H5: Employees with higher levels of (a) supervisor support and (b) trust in their supervisor are more likely to want to WFH in the future.
- H6: Employees who worked for organizations that offered flextime before the pandemic are more likely to want to WFH in the future.

Reactions to Pandemic WFH

- H7: Employees reporting higher levels of burnout and telepressure during the pandemic are less likely to want to WFH in the future.
- H8: Employees reporting lower levels of (a) physical and (b) mental health during the pandemic are less likely to want to WFH in the future.



Conclusions and Future Research

- One individual strategy, four organizational strategies, and one adverse reaction were significantly correlated with an employee's desire to continue to WFH.
- Of the variables examined, a formal organizational telework policy had the strongest correlation with desire to WFH in the future.
- The only well-being oriented outcome to pandemic WFH to be significantly related to the desire to WFH was physical health.
- Only a third of the respondents completed the 2nd survey.
- More research is needed on how organizations should manage employee desire to WFH and when to extend the opportunity to employees who want it.
- Future research should focus on determining how well the study correlates actually predict which employees WFH in the future.