


## Chapter 16

# Work From Home in Pandemic Contexts: Habits and Productivity

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Working from home was seen as one of the most convenient options to respond to productivity needs during the COVID-19 pandemic, but this type of work caused significant social and organizational changes, which demanded the employees' adaptation to new working conditions. The present study aims to describe the health habits developed during quarantine periods under the work-from-home modality. It also seeks to establish the relationships between these habits and perceived productivity, and to identify preferences for returning to the workplace based on productivity in a sample of 588 workers from Colombia. The results indicated that approximately half of the participants reported a perception of lower productivity, and the most prominent habit associated with perceived productivity was exercising. The relationship between productivity and the preference for returning to the workplace showed those who reported higher productivity preferences favored a hybrid work model, while those perceiving lower productivity preferred a return to in-person work.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the quarantine measures adopted worldwide, had a profound impact on different areas of life, including the individual, social and economic. This brought considerable organizational challenges, particularly in the management of work processes and in the adaptation of alternatives for working under emergency health conditions. Among the strategies considered to face productivity challenges, in many companies around the world, the modality of working from home was accepted, which was reported as the most recurrent (Arruda, 2020; Bartik *et al.*, 2020; Galanti *et al.*, 2021).

During quarantine periods, working from home was established as an appropriate way to deal with contingencies in administrative and operational terms (Sutarto *et al.*, 2021; de Lucas *et al.*, 2021) because it ensured compliance with the public health provisions and regulations, while maintaining the functioning and commitment of organizations (Lane *et al.*, 2020).

In addition to contributing to the reduction of contagion risks, working from home eliminated transportation time, and provided more flexible work schedules, but also generated more frequent interruptions due to domestic obligations, more costs in team coordination and communication of work, and uncertainties regarding productivity (United Nations *et al.*, 2021; Lane *et al.*, 2020).

During periods of confinement, a large part of the workforce in many productive sectors had to adapt to abrupt changes in working conditions and transition to remote work, regardless of the material, technology, and training resources that this modality demanded (Bick *et al.*, 2021; Stoker *et al.*, 2022; Vander *et al.*, 2020).

In some sectors and types of companies where remote work had been an option before the pandemic, the adaptation was faster and with fewer problems. However, in general, multiple difficulties had to be faced, which significantly affected the quality of life of workers (Garrote *et al.*, 2021; Kugler *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, there were tasks that could not be performed from home and could not be quickly adjusted to this modality, as they lacked adaptability (Kramer & Kramer, 2020). This lack of adaptability could affect the health of employees, lead to changes in their lifestyle and affect their overall well-being (Tavares, 2017).

Workdays at home disrupted daily routines, causing changes in life habits, and leading to negative effects on the well-being of workers (see, Anh *et al.*, 2022; Ekpanyaskul & Padungtod, 2021; Kossen & van der Berg, 2022; Lippi *et al.*, 2020; Robinson *et al.*, 2021). Some of these changes were related to eating routines, alterations in sleep and rest schedules; sleeping more in the morning as a consequence of going to rest later at night (Salfi *et al.*, 2022); sedentary lifestyle; and neglect in physical and mental self-care (for example, not attending medical or dental check-ups, or not spending time with family and social circle).

However, it has also been pointed out that during the periods of confinement and work from home, habits considered beneficial for health and hygiene practices associated with prevention were acquired, such as hand washing, cleaning and ventilation of spaces, greater involvement in the preparation and balance of food (Jribi *et al.*, 2021), the practice of hobbies and the inclusion of exercise routines at home (Kumbhar, 2020).

On the other hand, the work from home modality influenced workers' attitudes towards the conditions of return to normality. In addition to the advantages and disadvantages of working from home, once the skills to do so were developed, signs of reluctance began to emerge in several sectors toward the idea of returning to pre-pandemic environments. This led many workers to compare working from home with

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