

Microtransitions: What makes working from home so frustrating

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Working from home increases frustration and can lead to potential conflicts between live-in partners. Sound familiar? In the working paper "Mitigation of Work-Family Frustration in Dual-Earner Couples during

COVID-19: The Role of ICT Permeability, Planning, and Gender Effect," Bocconi's Massimo Magni, Associate Professor at the Department of Management and Technology, shows how the "work-life shock event" of COVID-19 creates a difficult dynamic in the home.

Magni and his co-authors Manju Ahuja and Rui Sundrup from University of Louisville (U.S.) monitored the habits of 117 people for 10 days by asking them to fill out three questionnaires daily, and also surveyed the respondent's life partner. The research grew out of a previous study looking at addiction and the use of mobile technologies in the home, says Magni. During the pandemic, the suddenness of the transition and the availability of technology meant that people simply were not prepared for the round-the-clock stress of permeable demands for their attention.

"We wanted to look at what happened during COVID-19 in an environment where people are forced to switch back and forth between work and family roles all day given the human limitations of cognitive and emotional resources," said Magni. "What are the consequences of these blurred lines?"

Respondents reported an increase in [frustration](#) from the effort of continuous "micro-transitions" to reallocate energy, concentration and cognitive resources in different spheres simultaneously. The frustration leads to an increase in conflict within the family environment, the study showed. Performance was not impacted over the 10-day period, "but maybe we needed a longer time span," he observed.

The study also found that the frustration level was higher for women, given their greater responsibilities in the family sphere.

Planning can help alleviate this frustration, the study says. Behavioral planning helps set boundaries about when a partner can and cannot be

disturbed. Temporal planning sets "off limits" times for uninterrupted concentration. "Planning helps make these micro-transitions manageable," said Magni.

Provided by Bocconi University

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