

# Record technostress and reduced well-being show that remote working isn't as good as we thought

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

At the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, at least [557 million workers](#) were forced to work from home.

Up until a few months ago, many employers and government bodies had

been extensively promoting the practice, albeit mainly for safety and security reasons. Other upsides have been amply documented by both the media and academia: more time spent with loved ones, and reduced transportation costs, commuting time, and air pollution. All in all, working from home has been touted as the best way for employees to [keep mentally and physically fit](#)), helped by the ability to work from any location so long as there is a fast Internet connection.

But excess screen time can also generate less welcome effects, such as "technostress." The term was coined in 1984 by the [clinical psychologist Craig Brod](#), who described it as a modern disease caused by one's inability to cope or deal with information and [communication technologies](#) in a healthy manner. Technostress is the stress caused by overuse of technology at work and/or in [private life](#), and researchers have demonstrated it can lead to negative psychological reactions such as [emotional exhaustion](#).

## **When technostress flares up**

In our latest paper in the [Journal of Business Research](#) we looked at how our excessive reliance on technology in both our work and [personal lives](#) during the pandemic impacted our technostress levels. To answer this question, we surveyed 306 British workers who were employed (mostly full-time) before and at the time of the survey, in July 2020. We asked them about their professional experience as they navigated lockdown, stay-at-home policies, and strict social distancing.

In remote-working scenarios, people had to manage various digital platforms and applications while simultaneously juggling their work, familial, and social commitments.

Furthermore, digital platforms used for personal and social purposes exposed users to excessive, contradictory, and confusing information

that were also likely to hike stress levels. A surfeit of misinformation and [fake news](#) on social media stirred up both confusion and anxiety, including [conspiracy theories](#) that downplayed COVID-19's severity or denied the virus' existence altogether.

## **Experienced remote workers suffered less**

However, the study results also show that employees with previous remote working experience coped better with technostress than individuals with none. Experienced remote workers also happened to better manage working applications and time at large.

But past a certain time, even experienced remote workers succumbed to stress and experience feelings of alienation. A single remote [worker](#) aged 40 declared:

"During the COVID-19 lockdown and after, my productivity has increased as I no longer have to commute to work, and I can't have casual chats with colleagues in the office. This increased my concentration and capacity to produce more in less time. However, I gained 15 kilos weight in two years because I had fewer incentives for doing any physical activity between work and bedtime. Furthermore, I felt increasingly detached from the work environment, my colleagues, and my company, which caused some stress.

"COVID-19 gave me the opportunity to spend more time with my family and kids. The first month went well although what was happening outside we were enjoying family time. However, with all the kids at home it was difficult to concentrate and carry out my tasks properly... I also missed the coffee breaks with my colleagues so that we organized the virtual coffee breaks at 11a.m."

## The problem of loneliness

These results contradict the wisdom that working from home is better for workers' satisfaction and well-being. A forced prolonged situation of working from home can alienate workers and create a sense of loneliness over time. Indeed, remote working is associated with fewer face-to-face meetings, [interpersonal communication](#), bonding, community building, and brainstorming, however fundamental the latter may be for innovative companies.

It is evident that many companies have understood this and are asking employees to come back to the office, of which one significant example is [Google](#). The easing of COVID-19 restriction measures has seen many companies define new hybrid working solutions.

It appears that the working from home mode is not, after all, going to be the "new normal" in the post-pandemic world. In the ongoing battle between bosses and workers over returning to the office, recent data shows more people are [trudging back to the workplace](#). However, it has certainly given more flexibility to workers and can be beneficial, as long as a careful balance is maintained, primarily through providing hybrid models of working and taking the preferences and needs of organizations and workers into account.

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