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PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY

Bosses working from home can trust these employees blindly

by Dominik Reintjes
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Whether an employee works productively in the home office also depends on personality traits.
Image: imago images

Researchers from Latvia were able to show that personality traits have a major impact on whether employees are more productive in the office or in the home office. This is how managers can use this knowledge.

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Two and a half years after the outbreak of the pandemic, working from home is still dividing executives and managers. While some enjoy the fact that their employees send emails just before midnight, others fear losing control. [A recent survey by HR consultants Hays](#) showed that 58 percent of executives have introduced more detailed controls since home working became a thing of the past. Such reservations are understandable: while managers have been able to watch their employees at work for years, employees now do it behind closed doors. [And who knows how productive they really are?](#)

A study from Latvia now provides an answer to this question. If managers knew the personality of their employees, they would know exactly who to trust in the home office - that's the core message. The study was published by the IZA (Institute for the Future of Work) in Bonn and examines the connection between personality traits of an employee and their productivity in the home office and in the office. Managers can derive clear strategies from the study results.

According to them, they can trust their most conscientious employees blindly and should let them decide how often they work from home "The conscientious should organize the work themselves, they will not choose a solution in which they are less productive", says study author Mihails Hazans. Even open, curious employees prefer to work at home and are also more productive there. The preference of sociable colleagues seems particularly logical: they prefer to work in the office – and are also more productive there. This also applies to the particularly helpful colleagues.



HOME OFFICE ABROAD

That's how risky the new freedom for managing directors is

by Claudia Toedtmann

For the study, Hazans and his colleague Nicolas Gavoille surveyed 1,700 employees in Latvia who worked from home during the pandemic. Gavoille researches and teaches at the Stockholm School of Economics in Riga - a subsidiary of the private business university in Stockholm. Hazans conducts research at IZA and is Professor of Econometrics at the University of Latvia in Riga, the oldest and largest university in the Baltic state. Hazans says, "For managers, the question of ~~working from home~~ ~~or working from home~~ isn't just about getting the best out of their workforce — it's also about not losing their most important employees and attracting new ones."

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Their study is based on the five-factor model of personality research - the so-called Big Five. According to this theory, personality is based on five dimensions that can be strong or weak in every human being: conscientiousness, agreeableness, extraversion, neuroticism and openness to experience. Those who have a high degree of conscientiousness act effectively and in an organized manner. Extraverts like to be around other people, while agreeable people are often described as compassionate and accommodating. Open people are considered curious. Researchers define neuroticism as people who are emotionally unstable, vulnerable and have low self-esteem. Although critics of the model keep citing it cannot adequately describe a complex personality. And yet, in psychology, the Big Five are now considered the method of choice for measuring a person's personality.

Just not a uniform rule



EXCLUSIVE DATA FROM LONG-TERM STUDY

The truth about the home office in five graphics

by Dominik Reintjes

And so the findings of the researchers from Latvia should also be of particular interest. [In many places, there are already company agreements or agreements with the team that regulate whether](#)



employees have to come to the office or stay at home. But these are mostly based on the personal wishes of the employees or the will of the employer. Hazans agrees: "Managers will not maximize worker productivity with a unified policy for working in the office and working from home."

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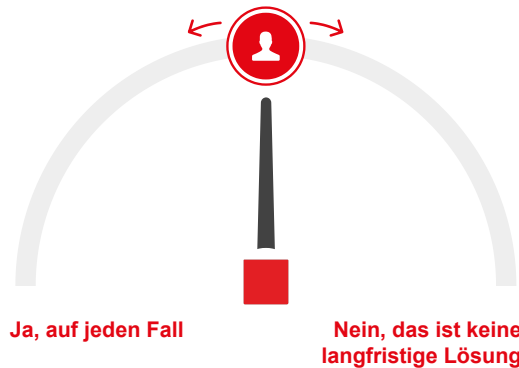
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It is therefore important to offer every employee the right opportunities. And while conscientious employees value complete independence, companies should also offer extraverted employees social exchanges when working from home. For example in the form of digital lunch breaks or personal calls to clarify questions.

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But to do this, managers need to know the personality traits of their employees. The researchers used a test in which the respondents had to agree or disagree with various statements. And on a scale of one to seven. To determine whether employees are particularly conscientious, they asked: "I see myself as reliable, self-disciplined." And: "I see myself as messy, carefree."

However, according to Hazans, managers do not have to carry out empirical surveys. "A good manager should be able to identify particularly conscientious and open employees without difficulty." In any case, the boundaries between personality traits are fluid. They don't represent five different categories of people. "The five trait measures are nearly uncorrelated," says Hazans. So it's entirely possible for an employee to be very conscientious and very sociable at the same time. In the study, Hazans and Gavouille had the top two scores on the traits of sociability and [extraversion](#) in 14 percent of respondents. "It's not possible to predict whether such an employee would prefer to work from home or not," says Hazans. The two researchers also recommend offering these employees as much home office as they want. If they wanted to go to the office more often, they would do so of their own accord.

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Only in the case of the fifth personality trait, neuroticism, i.e. in emotionally unstable people, the researchers were unable to determine a preference for office or home office. "That actually surprised us the most out of all the results - and we don't even have an explanation for it," admits Hazans.

Also read: [What is a dream for many employees can end up as a personal nightmare for managers - in the worst case in jail. What pitfalls to watch out for when working from home abroad.](#)



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