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Personality, Motivation, and Adapting to Remote Working during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The rapid transition to remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic substantially altered how employees organized work, communicated, and managed occupational demands. The present study examined whether personality traits, motivational tactics, and psychological need satisfaction were associated with adaptation to remote working during the early stages of the pandemic. A sample of 256 employees completed measures assessing personality, motivational tactics, psychological need satisfaction, engagement, burnout, cyberslacking, and remote working performance and satisfaction. Hierarchical regression analyses indicated that personality traits, motivational tactics, and need satisfaction explained additional variance in remote work outcomes beyond demographic factors alone. In particular, Conscientiousness, Adjustment, and self-management behaviours were generally associated with higher engagement and remote working performance, as well as lower burnout and cyberslacking. Similarly, poorer emotional adjustment and lower psychological need satisfaction were associated with less favourable remote work experiences. The findings suggest that adaptation to remote working during periods of organizational disruption may depend on employees' capacity for self-regulation and emotional adjustment under conditions of reduced workplace structure and increased uncertainty. However, findings related to psychological need satisfaction should be interpreted cautiously due to the low internal consistency of these constructs in this sample. The study highlights the importance of considering individual differences when examining and supporting employee adaptation.

Keywords

Remote Working, COVID-19, Personality, Self-Regulation, Burnout

1. Introduction

The rapid transition to remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic represented one of the largest disruptions to contemporary work design in modern organisational history. Although remote and hybrid working arrangements had been increasing gradually for several decades prior to the pandemic (Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Breaugh & Farabee, 2012), government-mandated lockdowns forced millions of employees into remote work with little preparation, limited organisational infrastructure, and substantial uncertainty (Delany, 2021; Wang et al., 2021). This abrupt transition fundamentally altered how employees communicated, collaborated, and managed their daily work demands. The consequences of this remain to this day.

1.1. Remote Working

The widespread adoption of remote working generated considerable interest within organisational psychology because it transformed many of the structural and social conditions traditionally associated with effective work performance and employee well-being (Allen et al., 2015; Bloom et al., 2015; Gifford, 2022). Research conducted during and after the pandemic has demonstrated that remote working can provide important benefits, including greater flexibility, autonomy, and work-life balance (Felstead & Henseke, 2017; Kaufman & Taniguchi, 2021). However, remote work has also been associated with increased social isolation, communication difficulties, blurred work-home boundaries, work intensification, and psychological fatigue (Adisa et al., 2023; Nesher Shoshan & Wehrt, 2022; Wang et al., 2021). Importantly, these findings suggest that remote working is not experienced uniformly across employees. While some individuals appear to adapt successfully and report high levels of satisfaction and productivity, others experience disengagement, burnout, and difficulties maintaining effective work behaviours (Furnham, 2021; Hall et al., 2024).

Much of the existing literature on remote work has focused on organisational and situational factors, including job characteristics, communication structures, managerial practices, and work-family boundaries (Golden & Gajendran, 2019; Sardeshmukh et al., 2012). Comparatively less attention has been devoted to the role of individual differences in shaping adaptation to remote working conditions, particularly during the highly unusual context of the early COVID-19 transition. This is an important omission because remote working places greater demands on self-regulation, independent task management, and psychological adjustment. Employees working remotely often have reduced access to informal learning opportunities, spontaneous feedback, and direct social support, while simultaneously requiring greater self-management and emotional resilience (Bailenson, 2021; Carmody et al., 2022).

The present study examines whether personality traits, motivational tactics, and psychological need satisfaction are associated with employees' self-reported adaptation to remote working during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Drawing on Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000), personality research, and emerging remote working literature, the study investigates how individual differences relate to both positive and negative remote work outcomes, including remote working performance and satisfaction, engagement, burnout, and cyberslacking. By examining these factors simultaneously, the study aims to provide a more integrated understanding of why some individuals appeared to adapt more effectively to forced remote working conditions than others.

1.2. Remote Working during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The rapid transition to remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic differed substantially from traditional teleworking arrangements that had been examined in earlier organisational research. Prior to the pandemic, remote work was often voluntary, partial, and supported by organisational planning and employee choice (Bailey & Kurland, 2002; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). In contrast, the early stages of the pandemic forced many employees into full-time remote work with limited preparation, reduced organisational support, and considerable uncertainty regarding job security, health, and social restrictions (Delany, 2021; Wang et al., 2021). Consequently, remote working during this period represented not only a change in work location, but a broader psychological and social disruption.

Research conducted during the pandemic suggests that remote working produced mixed psychological outcomes. Although many employees reported benefits associated with increased flexibility, reduced commuting, and greater control over scheduling (Felstead & Henseke, 2017; Kaufman & Taniguchi, 2021), remote work was also associated with work intensification, blurred work-home boundaries, social isolation, and increased exhaustion (Adisa et al., 2023; Hall et al., 2024). These effects appear to have been particularly pronounced during the early pandemic period, when employees were simultaneously adapting to new technologies, altered communication practices, and broader societal uncertainty.

One important challenge associated with remote working concerns changes in communication and social interaction. Physical separation reduces opportunities for informal interaction, spontaneous feedback, observational learning, and collaborative problem-solving (Allen et al., 2015). Research during COVID-19 further demonstrated that remote working reduced weaker interpersonal ties within organisations, potentially limiting knowledge exchange and informal social support (Carmody et al., 2022). At the same time, reliance on videoconferencing and digital communication introduced new psychological demands. Nesher Shoshan & Wehrt (2022) found that employees frequently reported higher levels of exhaustion associated with prolonged video-based communication, while Bailenson (2021) proposed that "Zoom fatigue" may arise from heightened self-monitoring, increased cognitive load, and sustained non-verbal attentional demands.

At a broader level, remote working may therefore be understood as creating both psychological resources and psychological demands. While greater flexibility

and autonomy may enhance motivation and work satisfaction, remote work can simultaneously increase social disconnection, ambiguity, and emotional strain. Perry et al. (2018) described remote work as a "challenge stressor," capable of promoting engagement for some employees while increasing burnout and disengagement for others. These contrasting findings suggest that employees differ considerably in their capacity to adapt to remote working conditions. Consequently, understanding the role of individual differences may be particularly important in explaining variation in remote work experiences and outcomes.

1.3. Self-Determination Theory and Remote Work

SDT provides a useful framework for understanding employees' psychological experiences during remote working (Deci & Ryan, 2000). SDT proposes that motivation, well-being, and effective functioning are shaped by the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy refers to the experience of volition and control over one's behaviour, competence reflects feelings of mastery and effectiveness, and relatedness concerns feelings of social connection and belonging. Satisfaction of these needs has consistently been associated with higher engagement, well-being, and occupational functioning across a range of workplace contexts (Van den Broeck et al., 2016).

Remote working may simultaneously support and frustrate these psychological needs. On one hand, remote work often provides employees with greater flexibility and control over how and when work tasks are completed, potentially enhancing autonomy and intrinsic motivation (Felstead & Henseke, 2017; Kaufman & Taniguchi, 2021). On the other hand, remote working may undermine competence and relatedness through reduced access to informal feedback, collaborative learning, and spontaneous social interaction (Carmody et al., 2022). Employees may therefore experience greater uncertainty regarding performance effectiveness, alongside reduced social connection with colleagues and organisations. These effects may have been particularly pronounced during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, when many employees were adjusting rapidly to unfamiliar work arrangements.

Importantly, SDT also suggests that individuals may differ in how effectively they maintain psychological need satisfaction under changing work conditions. Employees who are better able to self-regulate, maintain motivation, and adapt to reduced structure may experience more positive remote working outcomes than those who struggle with isolation, ambiguity, or reduced external guidance. Consequently, examining the relationship between psychological need satisfaction, motivational tactics, and remote work outcomes may help explain why some employees adapted more successfully to remote working conditions than others.

1.4. Personality and Remote Work Adaptation

Personality traits are consistently associated with important occupational out-

comes, including performance, engagement, stress tolerance, and workplace behaviour (Furnham, 2018). Personality may be particularly relevant in remote working contexts because remote work often reduces external structure while increasing demands on self-regulation, independent task management, and emotional adjustment. Research examining remote working has consistently highlighted the importance of Conscientiousness and Neuroticism (low Adjustment). Conscientious individuals tend to report greater remote work satisfaction and productivity, whereas individuals higher in Neuroticism are more likely to experience stress, burnout, and poorer adjustment under remote working conditions (Evans et al., 2022; Furnham et al., 2024; Gavoille & Hazans, 2022).

The present study utilised the High Potential Trait Indicator (HPTI), a work-related personality measure assessing Conscientiousness, Adjustment, Curiosity, Risk Approach, Ambiguity Acceptance, and Competitiveness (Furnham & Treglown, 2018; MacRae & Furnham, 2020). These traits may be particularly relevant during remote working because employees are often required to manage ambiguity, work independently, and adapt to changing work demands with reduced social feedback and supervision.

Although previous studies have linked personality to remote work preference and productivity, less research has examined how personality relates simultaneously to both positive and negative indicators of adaptation during the abrupt transition to remote working during COVID-19. The present study therefore examined how personality traits relate to remote working performance and satisfaction, engagement, burnout, and cyberslacking.

1.5. Remote Working and Motivational Tactics

Remote working may influence both positive and negative aspects of occupational functioning. Positive indicators of adaptation include higher engagement, perceived productivity, and work satisfaction, whereas negative outcomes may include burnout, disengagement, and cyberslacking. Work engagement reflects a positive and fulfilling work-related state characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002), and previous research has shown that engagement is generally associated with higher Conscientiousness and emotional stability (Rigg, 2013). In contrast, burnout reflects chronic work-related exhaustion and strain, which may become more pronounced under conditions of social isolation, ambiguity, and blurred work-home boundaries (Adisa et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2021). Cyberslacking, defined as using the internet for non-work-related purposes during work time, has also emerged as a relevant remote working behaviour and has previously been associated with lower Conscientiousness and reduced self-regulation (O'Neill et al., 2014).

Remote working may place greater importance on employees' ability to self-regulate and maintain motivation independently of direct supervision or organisational structure. O'Neill et al. (2014) proposed that motivation tactics such as self-management, conscious socialisation efforts, and regular upward communi-

cation may help employees maintain productivity and engagement while e-working remotely. In particular, self-management behaviours, including planning work routines and regulating distractions, may become especially important under remote working conditions where external structure is reduced. Examining both motivational tactics and remote work outcomes simultaneously may therefore provide greater insight into why some employees adapted more effectively to remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic than others.

1.6. Present Study & Hypotheses

The rapid and involuntary transition to remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic created a unique opportunity to examine why some employees adapted more successfully to remote work conditions than others. Although previous research has examined remote working preferences, productivity, and well-being, comparatively less research has integrated personality traits, motivational tactics, and psychological need satisfaction within the same study, particularly during the early stages of the pandemic when employees were adapting to unfamiliar and highly disrupted work conditions.

The present study examined the extent to which demographic characteristics, personality traits, motivational tactics, and psychological need satisfaction were associated with both positive and negative indicators of remote work adaptation. Specifically, the study focused on remote working performance and satisfaction, engagement, burnout, and cyberslacking. By examining these outcomes simultaneously, the study aimed to provide a broader understanding of individual differences associated with remote working experiences during the COVID-19 period.

Based on previous research, several hypotheses were proposed. First, older employees were expected to report more positive remote work outcomes, reflecting greater occupational experience, seniority, and potentially more stable remote working environments. Second, Conscientiousness and adjustment were expected to be positively associated with remote working performance, satisfaction, and engagement, and negatively associated with burnout and cyberslacking. Thirdly, motivational tactics, particularly self-management behaviours, were expected to be positively associated with remote working performance and engagement. Fourth, autonomy and competence satisfaction were expected to be positively associated with remote work adaptation outcomes, whereas lower relatedness satisfaction was expected to be associated with poorer remote work experiences under conditions of reduced interpersonal interaction.

Finally, the study aimed to explore the relative contribution of these individual difference variables in explaining variance in remote work outcomes beyond demographic factors alone. Given the unusual and psychologically demanding circumstances surrounding the early stages of pandemic remote working, understanding these relationships may provide insight into the factors associated with successful adaptation to remote work conditions.

2. Method

2.1. Participants and Procedure

Participants were recruited by a UK-based psychometric assessment publisher from a pre-existing research panel comprising individuals who have previously volunteered to participate in psychological research and agreed to be contacted for future studies. Participants were invited via email and offered brief individualised feedback on their assessment results as an incentive for participation. The study was approved by the committee LSA/TI/2020 and all participants provided informed consent prior to participation.

Data collection took place between 18 March and 30 March 2020 during the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, when many employees across participating countries were experiencing government-mandated lockdowns and abrupt transitions to remote working arrangements. For many participants, this represented their first sustained experience of remote working. Consequently, this study captured employee experiences during a period of substantial occupational and psychological disruption rather than under stable or voluntary remote working conditions. We did not have detailed data on whether participants had much or any prior remote working experience, or whether the transition was compulsory, which could have affected their responses.

The survey was administered online using a secure survey platform. Participants completed a battery of self-report measures assessing personality, motivational tactics, psychological need satisfaction, engagement, burnout, cyberslacking, and remote working experiences. Responses were anonymised prior to analysis. Missing data were handled using listwise deletion, with only complete responses retained for analysis.

The final sample consisted of 266 participants, including 130 males and 136 females. Participants had a mean age of 44.98 years (SD = 11.58). The majority of participants were based in the United Kingdom (54%), followed by South Africa (16%), Canada (14%), the United States (10%), and Australia (5%). Most participants were employed full-time (77%), with respondents representing a range of occupational sectors including manufacturing, healthcare, education, information technology, human resources, sales, and general management.

2.2. Measures

1) *High Potential Trait Indicator* (*HPTI*): The HPTI is a measure of personality traits, specifically within a workplace context. It is comprised of six factors. The inventory is 78 items in length. Each trait was converted into a standardised score to allow for better comparison between traits. Previous studies have reported that the six factors report acceptable internal validity, with alphas ranging from α = .72 (*Risk Approach*) to α = .80 (*Curiosity*) (MacRae & Furnham, 2020).

2) *Utrecht Work Engagement Scale* (*UWES*) (Schaufeli et al., 2002). The UWES is a 17-item inventory, where questions are grouped into three broad subscales

that identify different underlying facets of engagement: Vigor (six items), Dedication (five items), and Absorption (six items). The three subscales have reported acceptable internal validity: Vigor α = .80; Dedication α = .91; Absorption α = .75 (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

3) *Cyberslacking Scale:* Measured with three items taken from O'Neill et al. (2014). Items included '*When I'm working remotely, I get distracted more with non-work related internet activities than I do when I'm at the office*', '*When I am working remotely, I find myself getting sidetracked more often than when I am at the office*', and '*I'm more tempted to surf the internet for fun when I'm working remotely than from the office*'. The Alpha for this scale was .87.

4) *Remote Working Performance and Satisfaction* (O'Neill et al., 2014). The items and instruction text were adapted to reflect general remote working (e.g., working remotely from home, a café, hotel, or whilst travelling). The three questions were '*I am a strong performer while working remotely*', '*I am more productive when I work remotely*', and '*I enjoy working remotely*'. The Alpha for this scale was .81.

5) *Copenhagen Burnout Inventory* (*CBI*)*:* The CBI (Kristensen et al., 2005) has three subscales: personal-, work-, and client-related burnout. For this study, the work-burnout dimension was utilised, focusing on the degree of fatigue and exhaustion that employees experience as a result of their work (Crocetti et al., 2014). The instruction text was altered to focus on remote working specifically. The Alpha for this scale was .80.

6) *Basic Needs Satisfaction at Work Scale*: (Deci & Ryan, 2000). This scale addresses the need for satisfaction in general in one's life. The instructions were: The following questions concern your feelings about your job during the last year. (If you have been on this job for less than a year, this concerns the entire time you have been at this job.) Please indicate how true each of the following statement is for you given your experiences on this job. It has 21 items assessing the three needs for Competence, Autonomy, and Relatedness. In this study, the Alphas for the three scales were: Competence α = .61; Autonomy α = .49; Relatedness α = .71. Given the relatively low internal consistency observed for the autonomy subscale, findings involving this construct should be interpreted cautiously.

7) *Motivation Tactics* (O'Neill et al., 2014). Three factors are identified—self-management tactics (e.g. '*I stick to pre-planned, scheduled breaks*'), conscious socialization efforts (e.g. '*I make an effort to seek out human contact*'), and regular upward communication (e.g. '*I make a point of updating my supervisor regularly*'). The alphas for the three subsets of this scale were: self-management α = .78; conscious socialisation efforts α = .74; regular upward communication α = .85.

3. Results

3.1. Statistical Analysis

All analyses were conducted using R (version 4.2.2). Pearson correlation analyses were initially conducted to examine the relationship between demographic, per-

sonality, motivational, and remote work outcome variables.

To examine the relative contribution of different sets of predictors, a series of hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted using remote working performance and satisfaction, engagement, burnout, and cyberslacking as criterion variables. Predictors were entered in theoretically informed blocks, based on the stability of these variables: we assumed that personality (in adulthood) is more stable over time, compared to motivational tactics, which in turn were more stable than needs. Demographic variables were entered first as variables, followed by the personality variables. Motivational tactics were entered next as behavioural self-regulation variables, followed by psychological need satisfaction variables as more proximal experimental factions associated with remote work adaptation. The hierarchical approach allowed examination of the incremental variance explained by each predictor block beyond demographic characteristics alone.

3.2. Preliminary Results

Internal consistency estimates were acceptable for most measures, although autonomy and competence subscales of the Basic Needs Satisfaction at Work Scale demonstrated lower reliability and should therefore be interpreted cautiously.

3.3. Correlations

Table 1 shows correlations among the study variables. Consistent with our first two hypotheses, older age, Conscientiousness, and Adjustment were generally associated with more positive remote work outcomes. Older participants reported higher remote working performance, engagement, and lower cyberslacking. Conscientiousness was positively associated with self-management tactics and remote working performance, whereas Adjustment was negatively associated with burnout.

Motivational tactics also showed meaningful associations with remote work outcomes. In particular, self-management behaviours were positively associated with engagement and remote working performance and negatively associated with cyberslacking. Competence satisfaction was positively associated with engagement and remote working performance, whereas relatedness satisfaction showed a positive association with burnout and cyberslacking.

3.4. Hierarchical Regression Analysis

Results of the hierarchical regression analyses are presented in Table 2 and Table 3. Across the analyses, personality traits, motivational tactics, and psychological need satisfaction explained substantial additional variance in remote work outcomes beyond demographic variables alone.

Consistent with our hypotheses, higher levels of Conscientiousness and strong self-management tactics were associated with higher remote working performance and engagement. Adjustment was negatively associated with burnout, indicating that individuals with lower emotional stability reported greater work-related exhaustion during remote working conditions.

Table 1. Correlations between PPA, HPTI, and remote working performance, engagement, self-management tactics, burnout, and basic needs satisfaction.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
1) Age																						
2) Gender	−.09																					
3) Conscientiousness	.19**	−.22**																				
4) Adjustment	.15*	.06	−.1																			
5) Curiosity	−.23**	.21***	−.69**	−.39**																		
6) Risk Approach	−.23**	.03	−.59**	−.47**	.42**																	
7) Ambiguity Acc	−.09	−.03	.26**	−.07	−.20**	−.13*																
8) Competitiveness	.32***	−.08	−.12	.19**	.00	−.03	.01															
9) % Time Remote Working	−.19**	−.08	.19**	−.06	−.11	−.12	.60**	−.11														
10) Self-Management	.05	−.28**	.37**	.07	−.34**	−.28**	.61**	.20**	.61**													
11) Conscious Socialization	.36**	−.10	.27**	.22**	−.28**	−.36**	−.01	.44**	−.01	.29**												
12) Regular Upward Communication	−.24**	−.26**	.41**	.01	−.36**	−.20**	.44**	−.20**	.25**	.38**	−.07											
13) Autonomy	.16**	−.1	.1	.15*	−.19**	−.11	.12	.06	.09	.12	.21**	.09										
14) Competence	.04	−.12	−.13*	−.04	.09	.12	.09	.15*	.05	.08	−.08	.00	−.08									
15) Relatedness	.04	−.05	.02	.18**	−.11	−.10	.09	.16*	.08	.14*	.07	.07	.21***	.27***								
16) Engagement	.01	.04	−.05	−.1	.09	.09	.04	.04	.06	−.03	−.05	.05	.08	.34***	.34***							
17) Vigour	.18**	−.08	−.04	.07	−.03	−.03	.24***	.35***	.10	.26***	.27***	.00	.23***	.13*	.11	.09						
18) Dedication	.29**	−.04	.06	.11	−.14*	−.06	.28***	.32***	.12	.19**	.22***	−.07	.29***	.22***	.17**	.12	.52***					
19) Absorption	−.03	−.04	−.01	.13*	−.01	−.11	.20**	.28***	.15*	.20**	.24***	.11	.21***	.06	.24***	.07	.33***	.24***				
20) Burnout	.26**	−.13*	.13*	.02	−.16*	−.07	.30***	.26***	.10	.22***	.22***	.11	.22***	.34***	.25***	.22***	.35***	.52***	.14*			
21) Cyberslacking	.16*	−.13*	.06	.11	−.14*	−.08	.26***	.34***	.11	.26***	.19**	.10	.17**	.31***	.27***	.14*	.28***	.45***	.15*	.80***		
22) Performance	.22**	−.09	.08	.06	−.13*	−.04	.25***	.26***	.06	.17**	.19**	.10	.21***	.29***	.27***	.21***	.38***	.48***	.23***	.86***	−.58***	1

Gender coded as Male = 1, Female = 2. Note: *** = $p < .001$; ** = $p < .01$; * = $p < .05$.

Table 2. Regressions on remote working performance, engagement, burnout, and cyberslacking.

		RM Performance		Engagement		Burnout		Cyberslacking	
		β	t	B	t	β	t	B	t
Step 1	Age	.22	3.49***	.25	4.06***	−.05	−.79	−.23	−3.69***
	Gender	−.02	−.24	−.11	−1.73	.00	−.06	−.07	−1.11
	F Score; R^2	F(2, 251) = 6.25**; .047		F(2, 251) = 1.4**; .077		F(2, 251) = .39; .002		F(2, 251) = 7.11***; .054	
Step 2	Conscientiousness	.19	2.09*	.38	4.48***	−.07	−.81	−.28	−3.16***
	Adjustment	.02	.26	.18	2.59*	−.44	−6.40***	−.09	−1.27
	Curiosity	.14	1.60	−.01	−.07	.00	−.01	.12	1.37
	Risk Approach	−.13	−1.31	−.13	−1.45	.00	−.04	.05	.47
	AmbiguityAccept	.10	1.42	.10	1.51	.00	.03	−.12	−1.71
	Competitiveness	−.07	−.89	.07	.95	.07	.93	.14	1.90
	F Score; ΔR^2; Total R^2	F(8, 245) = 3.53**; Δ = .05; .097		F(8, 245) = 12.55**; Δ = .149; .226		F(8, 245) = 7.36***; Δ = .19; .194		F(8, 245) = 4.37***; Δ = .07; .125	
Step 3	Self-Management	.23	3.54***	.24	4.07***	−.10	−1.62	−.27	−4.13***
	Conscious Social	.03	.41	.11	1.82	−.11	−1.74	−.06	−.87
	Reg Upward Com	.06	.90	.09	1.55	−.03	−.41	.01	.12
	F Score; ΔR^2; Total R^2	F(11, 242) = 4.35**; Δ = .07; .165		F(11, 242) = 11.8 **; Δ = .10; .329		F(11, 242) = 6.35***; Δ = .03; .224		F(11, 242) = 5.44***; Δ = .07; .198	
Step 4	Autonomy	.05	.72	.05	.87	−.10	−1.40	−.01	−.07
	Competence	.56	8.66***	.33	5.15***	−.02	−.27	−.29	−4.08***
	Relatedness	−.18	−3.08***	−.07	−1.22	.03	.48	.15	2.33**
	F Score; ΔR^2; Total R^2	F(14, 239) = 11.52**; Δ = .24; .407		F(14, 239) = 11.02**; Δ = .09; .418		F(14, 239) = 5.18***; Δ = .01; .232		F(14, 239) = 6.27***; Δ = .07; .269	

Standardised betas used; Gender coded as Male = 1, Female = 2. Note: *** = $p < .001$; ** = $p < .01$; * = $p < .05$.

Table 3. Regressions on basic needs satisfaction at work.

		Autonomy		Competence		Relatedness	
		β	t	β	t	β	t
Step 1	Age	.17	2.75**	.29	4.75***	−.03	−.52
	Gender	−.06	−1.02	−.02	−.26	−.05	−.74
	F Score; R^2	F(2, 251) = 4.59*; .035		F(2, 251) = 11.5***; .085		F(2, 251) = .376; .003	
Step 2	Conscientiousness	.26	3.10**	.41	4.96***	.13	1.47
	Adjustment	.25	3.64***	.22	3.31**	.28	4.03***
	Curiosity	−.05	−.56	.05	.61	.13	1.46

Continued

	Risk Approach	.06	.64	−.14	−1.51	−.10	−1.07
	Ambiguous Accept	.12	1.70	.08	1.17	.20	2.81**
	Competitiveness	−.07	−.98	−.12	−1.70	.11	1.41
	F Score; ΔR^2; Total R^2	F(8, 245) = 7.93***; Δ = .17; .206		F(8, 245) = 1.5***; Δ = .17; .255		F(8, 245) = 5.43***; Δ = .13; .166	
Step 3	Self-Management	.06	.88	.13	2.14*	−.01	−.18
	Conscious Social	−.01	−.08	.07	1.17	.19	2.96**
	Upward Comm	.0	1.15	.03	.53	−.01	−.15
	F Score; ΔR^2; Total R^2	F(11, 242) = 6.06***; Δ = .01; .216		F(11, 242) = 8.76***; Δ = .03; .285		F(11, 242) = 5.36***; Δ = .03; .197	

Standardised betas used; Gender coded as Male = 1, Female = 2. Note: *** = $p < .001$; ** = $p < .01$; * = $p < .05$.

Psychological need satisfaction also contributed meaningfully to remote work outcomes. Greater competence satisfaction was associated with her engagement and remote working performance, whereas relatedness satisfaction was positively associated with cyberslacking. However, given the relatively low internal consistency of the competence and autonomy subscales, these findings should be interpreted cautiously.

Overall, the regression analyses suggested that individual differences in personality, self-regulation, and psychological need satisfaction were systematically associated with adaptation to remote working during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.

4. Discussion

The present study examined how personality traits, motivational tactics, and psychological need satisfaction were associated with remote work adaptation during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. Consistent with previous research, the findings suggested that employees reporting greater Conscientiousness, Adjustment, and self-management behaviours generally experienced more positive remote working outcomes, including higher engagement and remote working performance and lower burnout and cyberslacking (Evans et al., 2022; Furnham et al., 2024; O'Neill et al., 2014). In contrast, poorer emotional adjustment and lower psychological need satisfaction were associated with less favourable remote work experiences. However, it should be noted that there was a positive association between relatedness satisfaction and burnout as well as cyberslacking. This could be because those who invested time and energy in relationships tended to be more inclined to cyberslacking, as well as getting more burnt out as they tried to balance friendships and work demands. However, this merits further investigation.

Importantly, these findings should be interpreted within the unique context of the early COVID-19 pandemic, during which many employees experience abrupt

and involuntary transitions to remote working arrangements. Rather than reflecting stable preferences for remote work, the findings may be better understood as indicators of differential adaptation to disrupted and highly uncertain working conditions. Remote work during this period likely increased demands on self-regulation, emotional adjustment, and independent task management, whilst simultaneously reducing access to social support, informal feedback, and established workplace routines (Wang et al., 2021; Carmody et al., 2022). Consequently, the findings suggest that individual differences may play an important role in understanding why some employees adapted more effectively to remote work than others.

4.1. Self-Regulation, Structure, and Remote Work Adaptation

One of the clearest findings of the present study was the importance of self-regulation and behavioural structure in shaping remote working experiences during the COVID-19 transition period. Higher Conscientiousness and greater use of self-management tactics were consistently associated with more positive remote work outcomes, including higher engagement and remote working performance, and lower cyber slacking. These findings are broadly consistent with previous research demonstrating that Conscientiousness is associated with greater organisation, persistence, goal orientation, and self-discipline across workplace settings (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Furnham, 2018). Under remote working conditions, such characteristics may become particularly important because employees are required to manage work tasks with reduced external structure, supervision, and routine.

The findings also support previous suggestions that remote working increases demands on independent self-management and behavioural regulation (O'Neill et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2021). Employees working remotely often have greater flexibility over how and when work is completed, but this flexibility may simultaneously require individuals to create and maintain their own routines, regulate distractions, and manage work-home boundaries effectively. In this context, self-management behaviours may function as compensatory mechanisms that help individuals maintain engagement and productivity despite reduced organisational structure and increased environmental ambiguity.

Importantly, these findings may help explain why remote working appears to produce highly variable experiences across employees. Although remote work can provide increased autonomy and flexibility, the benefits of these working arrangements may depend partly on employees' capacity for self-regulation and independent task management. During the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, when many employees were adapting abruptly to unfamiliar working environments, individuals who were better able to maintain behavioural structure and emotional regulation may have experienced the transition less negatively than those who relied more heavily on external routines, supervision, or workplace social structure. This interpretation is consistent with challenge stressor perspectives

suggesting that remote working may simultaneously function as both a psychological resource and a source of strain, depending on individual and contextual factors (Perry et al., 2018).

4.2. Emotional Adjustment and Psychological Strain during Remote Working

The findings also highlighted the importance of emotional adjustment in shaping employees' experiences of remote working during the pandemic. Individuals reporting higher Adjustment (lower Neuroticism) generally reported lower burnout and more positive remote working experiences. This is consistent with previous research suggesting that emotionally stable individuals are typically better able to tolerate uncertainty, regulate stress responses, and maintain psychological functioning under challenged work conditions (Furnham, 2018; Evans et al., 2022). In contrast, individuals lower in Adjustment may have been more vulnerable to the emotional demands associated with prolonged social isolation, disrupted routines, and uncertainty during the early stages of the pandemic.

The psychological demands associated with remote working during COVID-19 were likely substantially different from those observed in more stable teleworking arrangements. Many employees experience reduced interpersonal contact, blurred work-home boundaries, increased caregiving demands, and ongoing uncertainty regarding health, employment, and organisational expectations (Adisa et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2021). Under these conditions, remote working may have intensified emotional exhaustion and psychological strain for some individuals, particularly those less comfortable with ambiguity or reduced social interaction. The present findings therefore support broader arguments that remote work should not be conceptualised as uniformly beneficial or harmful, but rather as an experience that may vary considerably depending on both individual characteristics and contextual demands (Perry et al., 2018).

Importantly, the findings also suggest that engagement and burnout may reflect partly different dimensions of remote work adaptation rather than opposite ends of a single continuum. Some employees may have remained productive and engaged despite experiencing elevated stress and exhaustion, particularly during the early pandemic period when work demands and uncertainty were unusually high. Consequently, remote working adaptation may involve maintaining functioning under strain rather than simply maximising well-being or job satisfaction.

4.3. Psychological Needs under Disrupted Work Conditions

The findings related to psychological need satisfaction should be interpreted more cautiously. Although competence satisfaction was positively associated with engagement and remote working performance, the competence and autonomy subscales demonstrated relatively low internal consistency within the present sample. Nevertheless, the broader pattern of the results remains theoretically consistent with SDT, which proposes that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are im-

portant determinants of motivation and psychological functioning (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Van den Broeck et al., 2016).

One possible interpretation is that the abrupt and highly disruptive nature of the early pandemic period may have altered how employees experienced and interpreted competence and autonomy within their work environments. During the transition to remote working, many employees were simultaneously adapting to unfamiliar technologies, altered communication practices, changing organisational expectations, and reduced opportunities for informal feedback and social learning. Under such notable conditions, employees' perceptions of competence and autonomy may have become less internally coherent or more context-dependent than under typical workplace conditions. Consequently, the lower internal consistency observed within these subscales may partly reflect the unusual occupational and psychological circumstances under which the data were collected.

The findings relating to relatedness are also noteworthy within the context of pandemic remote working. Previous research has consistently demonstrated that remote work can reduce opportunities for spontaneous social interaction and weaken interpersonal connection within organisations (Carmody et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2021). Given that relatedness is a central psychological need within SDT, reductions in workplace social connection may have contributed to poorer remote working experiences for some employees, particularly during prolonged periods of isolation and restricted face-to-face interaction.

4.4. Theoretical Implications

The present findings contribute to the growing literature suggesting that remote working outcomes are shaped not only by organisational or technological factors, but also by individual differences in self-regulation, emotional adjustment, and psychological need satisfaction. In particular, the findings support perspectives suggesting that remote working may place greater demands on independent behavioural regulation and adaptive coping, especially under conditions characterised by reduced structure, uncertainty, and social disruption (O'Neill et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2021). The study therefore extends previous remote work research by demonstrating that adaptation to remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic may have depended partly on employees' capacity to maintain behavioural structure, motivation, and psychological functioning under destabilised working conditions.

The findings also contribute to the emerging discussions regarding the contextual nature of psychological experiences during periods of organisational disruption. Although SDT proposes that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are fundamental psychological needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000), the relatively low internal consistency observed for some need satisfaction dimensions may suggest that employees experience these constructs less coherently during the abrupt transition to remote working. Under conditions of uncertainty, rapidly changing work practices, and reduced social interaction, workplace experiences of autonomy and com-

petence may have become more unstable or context-dependent than under typical occupational conditions. Consequently, this study highlights the importance of considering how large-scale organisational and societal change and disruption may influence not only employee well-being, but also the stability and interpretation of workplace psychological constructs themselves.

Finally, the present study supports conceptualisations of remote working as a psychologically heterogeneous experience rather than a universally beneficial or harmful work arrangement. Consistent with challenge stressor perspectives (Perry et al., 2018), the findings suggest that remote working may simultaneously provide flexibility and autonomy while also increasing ambiguity, isolation, and self-regulatory demands. Understanding remote work adaptation may therefore require greater consideration of how dispositional characteristics, motivational processes, and workplace structures interact under remote working conditions.

4.5. Practical Implications

This study suggests that successful adaptation to remote and hybrid working arrangements may depend partly on employee's capacity for self-regulation, behavioural organisation, and independent task management. Consequently, organisations may benefit from providing employees with greater support in developing self-management skills, including strategies relating to time management, routine development, boundary regulation, and distraction management. Such support may be particularly important for employees transitioning into remote or hybrid working environments for the first time or during periods of organisational disruption.

The findings also suggest remote working arrangements should not be approached as uniformly beneficial or appropriate for all employees. Although some individuals may thrive under conditions of increased flexibility and autonomy, others may experience greater difficulty managing ambiguity, isolation, or reduced workplace structure. Organisations may benefit from adopting a more flexible and individualised approach to remote working, including varying levels of managerial support, clearer communication practices, and opportunities for social interaction and collaborative engagement (Carmody et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2021).

Importantly, these findings should not be interpreted as suggesting organisations should select employees for remote work solely on the basis of personality traits. Rather, the findings suggest that employees may differ in types of support, structure, and flexibility they require to adapt effectively to remote working conditions. Consequently, organisations may benefit more from developing adaptive and supportive remote practices than from attempting to identify a single 'ideal' remote worker profile.

5. Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the present findings.

First, the study utilised a cross-sectional self-report design, which limits causal inference and increases the possibility of common method bias and shared variance amongst variables. Additionally, participants were recruited from a pre-existing volunteer research panel, which may limit the generalisability of the findings to broader working populations.

Second, the study was conducted during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic when many employees were experiencing abrupt and involuntary transitions to remote working. The findings should not be interpreted as reflecting stable preferences for remote work or typical remote working conditions. Rather, the results likely capture employee adaptation during a period of substantial organisational and psychological disruption. Furthermore, the autonomy and competence subscales demonstrated relatively low internal consistency. Although this may partly reflect the destabilising nature of the pandemic context, findings related to these constructs should be interpreted cautiously.

Future research would benefit from examining remote work adaptation, longitudinally and across more stable hybrid and remote working arrangements. In particular, future studies could explore how personality traits, self-regulation behaviours, and psychological need satisfaction interact over time as employees adapt to evolving work environments. Additional research using multi-source data, behavioural measures, or longitudinal designs may also help clarify the causal relationships between personality, motivation, and remote work outcomes.

6. Conclusion

This study examined how personality traits, motivational tactics, and psychological need satisfaction were associated with adaptation to remote working during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings suggest that employees with greater Conscientiousness, emotional Adjustment, and self-management behaviours generally experienced more positive remote working outcomes, including higher engagement and working performance as well as lower burnout and cyberslacking. More broadly, the findings suggest that adaptation to remote working during periods of organisational disruption may depend partly on employees' capacity to maintain behavioural structure, emotional regulation, and psychological functioning under conditions of uncertainty and reduced external support.

Data Availability

This is obtainable from the first author upon request.

Registration

This paper was not pre-registered with the journal.

Ethics

This was sought and obtained (LSA/2021: TI).

Informed Consent

Participants gave consent for their anonymised data to be analysed and published.

Author Contributions

A. Furnham: visualisation, writing—review & editing. L Treglown: data analysis, proofing.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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