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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Workplace fear of missing out in the context of working remotely versus in the office – A multimethod perspective from three studies

Linda-Elisabeth Reimann[1] | **Carmen Binnewies**[1] | **Lilly Kruse**[1] | **Karolin Küskes**[1] | **Helena Thorbrügge**[1] | **Phillip Ozimek**[2] | **Sophie Loose**[1]

[1]Work Psychology, University of Münster, Münster, Germany

[2]Work and Organizational Psychology, Vinzenz Pallotti University, Vallendar, Germany

Correspondence
Linda-Elisabeth Reimann, Work Psychology, University of Münster, Fliednerstraße 21, 48149 Münster, Germany.
Email: linda.reimann@uni-muenster.de

Abstract

In recent years, remote work has gained significant traction. While this shift enhances employee flexibility and work-life balance, it also introduces challenges, particularly regarding social connectedness and information exchange. Due to these challenges, it may be harder when working remotely to fulfil central work-related needs, as described by self-determination theory (SDT), resulting in workplace fear of missing out (wFoMO) – the anxiety of not being up-to-date stemming from physical disconnection from the office. This article addresses the underexplored relationship between remote work and wFoMO. We present three studies employing a multimethodological approach: Study 1 offers cross-sectional insights into the relationship between remote work and wFoMO; Study 2 and Study 3 are experimental, and their results indicate that wFoMO is heightened when individuals' needs, specifically those associated with relatedness, competence, and autonomy, are unmet in a remote work environment. Additionally, Study 3 reveals that when the need for autonomy is unmet, this leads to lower employee well-being via wFoMO. Collectively, these studies illuminate the complexities of remote work, specifically conditions under which remote work may be challenging for employees. Furthermore, these studies emphasize implications of remote work for wFoMO, and consequently, employee well-being.

KEYWORDS

needs, remote work, self-determination theory, trait-activation theory, well-being, wFoMO

Practitioner points

- Awareness of employees need deprivation in poor remote working conditions can help managers anticipate and address heightened workplace fear of missing out through timely support and inclusion practices.
- Practices such as inclusive communication and regular check-ins may reduce workplace fear of missing out and strengthen connectedness in remote teams.
- Flexible work arrangements that support autonomy are likely to increase motivation than rigid office mandates, providing HR professional with a lever to enhance employee engagement.
- Technology (or other measures) that increases transparency (e.g., who works remotely/in the office on a given day) and reduces uncertainty (e.g., who is available for feedback) may support competence and connectedness in remote work settings.

Recently, remote work has become increasingly prevalent and has reshaped traditional work environments: in 2023, 28% of employees worldwide worked remotely most of the time (PayScale, 2024). This shift offers numerous advantages for employees, such as increased flexibility and an improved work-life balance (Delanoeije & Verbruggen, 2020; Gajendran et al., 2024; Maruyama et al., 2009). However, remote work entails disadvantages if certain challenges are not overcome (Bartel et al., 2012; Cheng & Zhang, 2022; Ferreira et al., 2021; Golden et al., 2008), including reduced connectedness and inefficient informational exchange, thus potentially depriving employees of work-related needs according to self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2002; Gagné et al., 2022).

This deprivation is concerning, as it may give rise to dysfunctional states, such as workplace fear of missing out (wFoMO), namely, the anxiety of missing out on important information or relations when one is disconnected from work (Budnick et al., 2020). Previous studies have demonstrated that wFoMO is associated with adverse consequences for both employees and organizations (Budnick et al., 2020; Reimann et al., 2023).

Despite the growing relevance of remote work, insufficient research has focused on the relationship between working remotely and new challenges such as wFoMO. To address this gap, we expand the current theoretical understanding of wFoMO by integrating into our argument the personality trait-based interactionist model (Tett & Burnett, 2003). Applying this theory helps describe (1) why poorly managed remote work deprives employees of central needs, and (2) thus serves as a cue for enhancing wFoMO. To test these propositions, we conducted three consecutive studies employing a multimethod approach. Our aim was to contribute to a deeper understanding of remote work's impact on employee well-being since COVID-19. However, while we acknowledge that remote work can also foster need satisfaction, we answer calls from prior literature by examining potential negative effects arising from need deprivation (Gagné et al., 2022).

Study 1 provided preliminary cross-sectional evidence that working remotely is associated with wFoMO, and it included an open qualitative question about the main motives that drive employees into the office, thereby reinforcing the rationale presented in accordance with SDT.

Study 2 and Study 3 built on the findings of Study 1 using an experimental vignette design in which participants were asked to put themselves in a hypothetical (although realistic) situation. The vignettes followed Gagné et al. (2022), who described situations of need deprivation when working remotely, and were designed according to the trait-activation model (Tett & Burnett, 2003) to create strong/weak situations for wFoMO.

Study 2 aimed to provide causal evidence that working remotely leads to higher levels of wFoMO under certain conditions. We experimentally manipulated the need for relatedness and competence by

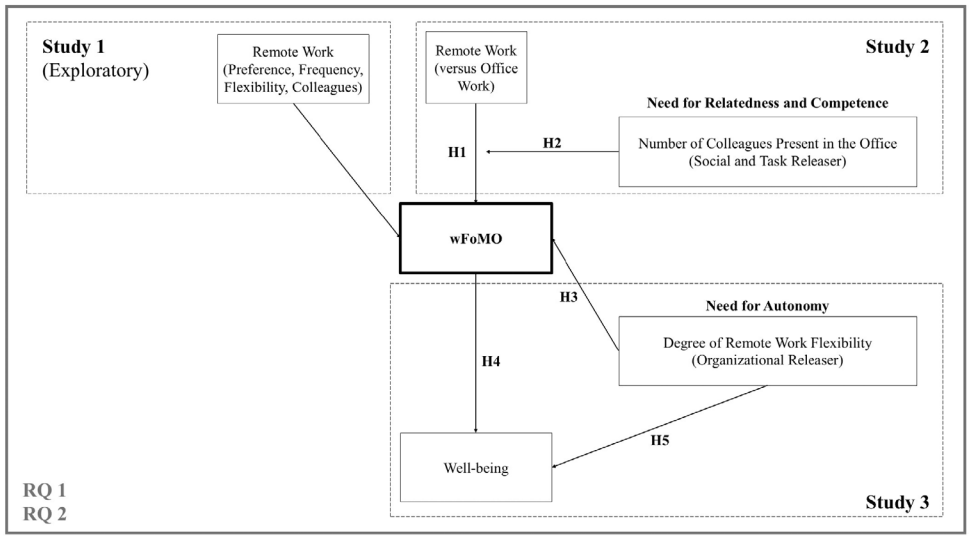

FIGURE 1 Overview of all research questions/hypotheses addressed in each study. H6 describes the indirect effect between H3*H4.

changing the work location (remote vs. office) and the presence of other colleagues (number of colleagues in the office). These results are helpful for companies thinking about how to manage hybrid work policies.

Finally, Study 3 complemented the findings of Study 2. By using vignettes again, we tested whether an unmet need for autonomy intensified the impact of remote work on wFoMO and whether this was negatively associated with well-being variables (negative affect, perceived state stress, work satisfaction). This approach broadens the scope beyond wFoMO and provides causal evidence for the negative effect that a deprived need for autonomy has in the context of remote work (Kaluza & van Dick, 2022; Lapierre et al., 2016).

For an overview of how the three studies built on one another, see Figure 1. To see how each hypothesis was derived from SDT and the trait-activation model, including the results, consult Table 1.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Working remotely refers to performing work outside the office, while *working from home* specifies doing so from one's private home (Heilmann et al., 2021). We use the term *working remotely* to encompass all non-office work arrangements, including hybrid models where employees alternate between office and remote work. Clarifying this definition is essential, as 54% of employees engage in hybrid work (Gallup, 2024).

Past research has shown ambivalent results regarding the effect of remote work on employee well-being and performance outcomes – some studies have reported mainly positive effects (Delanoeije & Verbruggen, 2020; Gajendran et al., 2015; Golden & Gajendran, 2019), while others have stressed negative effects (Abendroth & Reimann, 2018; Parent-Lamarche, 2022). Moreover, other studies have tried to consider both positive and negative relationships on employee outcomes by revealing an inverted U-shaped function of remote work intensity and job satisfaction (Qiu & Dauth, 2022) or by additionally considering moderating or mediating variables, such as autonomy, segmentation preference, isolation/loneliness, or group task interdependence (Bareket-Bojmel et al., 2023; Delanoeije et al., 2019; Gajendran et al., 2024; Podolsky et al., 2022).

TABLE 1 Overview of all research questions/hypotheses addressed in each study and their embedding into the respective theoretical framework.

Research question/hypothesis	Connection to SDT/trait-activation model	Study	Supported/rejected
RQ1: Does working remotely predict higher levels of wFoMO (informational as well as relational exclusion)?	See H1	1[a]	–
		2	–
		3	–
RQ2: Does having unmet work-related needs (relatedness, competence, and autonomy) strengthen the effect of remote work on wFoMO?	See H2, H3	1[a]	–
		2	–
		3	–
H1: Working remotely (vs. office) → more wFoMO	*SDT*: Adequate need satisfaction is harder when working remotely. → Need deprivation is linked to higher levels of wFoMO	2	Supported
H2: Working remotely (vs. office) → more wFoMO; moderated by the need for relatedness and the need for competence	*SDT*: The presence of other colleagues is central for both the need for relatedness and competence *Trait-activation model*: The work location of colleagues serves as a social and task releaser for wFoMO	2	Supported
H3: Forced remote work → more wFoMO	*SDT*: The 'forced remote work' regulation restricts the need for autonomy *Trait-activation model*: The 'forced remote work' regulation serves as an organizational releaser for wFoMO	3	Supported
H4: wFoMO → less well-being	*SDT*: As wFoMO results from need deprivation, it reduces employee well-being	3	Supported
H5: Forced remote work → less well-being	*SDT*: Need deprivation (autonomy) itself is associated with reduced employee well-being	3	Partially supported
H6: Forced remote work → less wFoMO → less well-being	*SDT*: see H3, H4, and H5 *Trait-activation model*: see H3	3	Supported

[a]Study 1 followed an exploratory approach.

As recent theoretical work suggests (Gagné et al., 2022), SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2002) may help to understand these mixed findings, as it offers a nuanced perspective suited to dissect how changing work environments can either support or hinder employees' fulfillment of psychological needs.

Self-determination theory in the context of remote work

With SDT, Deci and Ryan (2002) provided a comprehensive framework for understanding human motivation and development. It highlights the quality of motivated behaviour, which is one key to understanding and predicting how motivation influences individuals' well-being and performance. Accordingly, three needs are essential for optimal functioning and growth: competence, autonomy, and relatedness. How these needs interact determines the degree to which one perceives an action is self-determined (Deci & Ryan, 2002).

Competence involves feeling effective and mastering challenges. In a professional setting, this need is met when employees can grow, learn, and receive constructive feedback, boosting their motivation and engagement (Baard et al., 2004; Gagné & Deci, 2005). In remote settings, the need for competence can be enhanced, for example, by having greater access to information and communication or learning

opportunities, but it may be diminished by information overload or technological hassles (Gagné et al., 2022; Leung & Zhang, 2017).

Autonomy refers to the need to experience self-direction and personal endorsement. In the workplace, this involves having control over one's tasks and ensuring these tasks align with one's choices, personal values, and interests. Autonomy-supportive environments encourage initiative, a sense of ownership, job satisfaction (Ilardi et al., 1993), and motivation (Gagné & Deci, 2005; van den Broeck et al., 2008). Flexible schedules can enhance autonomy when working remotely, but close monitoring or increased demands can hinder it (Gagné et al., 2022; Lapierre et al., 2016; Stockkamp et al., 2023).

Relatedness involves feeling connected, cared for, and a sense of belonging. This need increases well-being through supportive and meaningful relationships with others (Fernet et al., 2013; van den Broeck et al., 2016). Examples of remote environments that enhance relatedness include (worldwide) virtual communication, while examples that decrease it relate to a lack of social support or isolation (Gagné et al., 2022; Leroy et al., 2021; Leung & Zhang, 2017; Vander Elst et al., 2017).

Workplace fear of missing out

Building on SDT, we argue that wFoMO is a critical and previously overlooked challenge that emerges from unmet needs (also *need deprivation*). This line of reasoning is consistent with findings from research on FoMO – the anxiety of missing out on rewarding experiences (Przybylski et al., 2013) – in the domain of social media use, where low satisfaction of basic needs has been shown to trigger FoMO (Przybylski et al., 2013). Moreover, our conception of wFoMO is in line with Gagné et al. (2022), who highlighted that today's work environments are increasingly shaped by uncertainty and complexity, the precise conditions under which individuals are more likely to experience anxiety and motivational disruption. In this sense, wFoMO may be understood as an emerging psychological response to the evolving structures of modern work.

Here, wFoMO, defined as the subconscious fear of missing out on information or beneficial relationships when being away or disconnected from work (Budnick et al., 2020), is conceptually related to professional isolation (Diekema, 1992), which is described as the belief of having insufficient connections to influential networks and social relationships (Golden et al., 2008; Miller, 1975). While both involve anticipated social disconnection (Budnick et al., 2020; Diekema, 1992), wFoMO includes both relational and informational exclusion, making it a two-dimensional construct (Budnick et al., 2020), whereas professional isolation is unidimensional (Cooper & Kurland, 2002; Miller, 1975). Moreover, professional isolation can occur even among physically present co-workers (Miller, 1975; Rokach, 1997; Smith, 1998) and is rather conceptualized as a trait, while wFoMO has trait and state proportions (Wegmann et al., 2017).

Previous work has already found that wFoMO is negatively associated with employee well-being, whereby one mediator is employees' use of information and communication technologies during leisure time (Reimann et al., 2023). Despite this, research on the predictors of wFoMO remains scarce.

Remote work and workplace fear of missing out

We base our argument on SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2002) and assert that needs may be harder to fulfil in the context of inadequately managed remote work conditions (Gagné et al., 2022). Past research suggested that remote work and work-related need satisfaction are intertwined (Becker et al., 2022; Brunelle & Fortin, 2021; Caligiuri & de Ciere, 2021). For instance, Pyöriä (2011) emphasized that remote workers' lack of social connections is worse for them than the benefits they gain in flexibility. Furthermore, being physically distant from one's workplace can hinder social integration and career progression (Bakker et al., 2004; Bartel et al., 2007; Golden & Eddleston, 2020; Pyöriä, 2011; Sardeshmukh et al., 2012). Another study by Mann and Holdsworth (2003) found that 57–62% of

teleworkers reported feelings of social isolation, which increased worries. Recent studies support these findings (Abendroth & Reimann, 2018; Adamovic, 2022; Bareket-Bojmel et al., 2023; Zürcher et al., 2021). Moreover, Rockmann and Pratt (2015) revealed that a lack of connection to colleagues may undermine employees' need for relatedness, even when private connections are present, highlighting the relevance of work-related connections. Additionally, remote workers often have reduced access to learning opportunities and career development (Cooper & Kurland, 2002; McDonald et al., 2008; Teo et al., 1998).

Some of these results – specifically those from pre-COVID-19 studies – may not directly apply to the current situation. First, since these studies were conducted, significant technological advancements have been made that have enhanced remote workers' abilities to stay connected with colleagues (Brunelle & Fortin, 2021). Nevertheless, remote employees may still have trouble cultivating connections with colleagues because their interactions may lack a richness of cues (see media richness theory, Sharma et al., 1981; also Brunelle & Fortin, 2021; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). Second, past studies have predominantly focused on fully remote workers, but many employees currently engage in hybrid work, splitting time between the office and remote settings (Gallup, 2024). Due to these dynamic changes, prior studies and studies conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., Chambel et al., 2023; Chênevert et al., 2022; Jimenez-Gomez et al., 2021; Leroy et al., 2021; Schulze et al., 2024) cannot be generalized to the current situation. Moreover, no empirical evidence exists on remote work and wFoMO. Thus, the overall research questions that we tackle are as follows:

RQ1. Does working remotely predict higher levels of wFoMO (informational and relational exclusion)?

RQ2. Does having unmet work-related needs (relatedness, competence, and autonomy) strengthen the effect of remote work on wFoMO?

Remote work, workplace fear of missing out, and need satisfaction

Using SDT as our framework, we propose that employees working remotely have unmet needs for relatedness (e.g., no spontaneous interactions or informal conversations), competence (e.g., limited opportunities for immediate feedback), and autonomy (e.g., restrictions regarding work location; see also Gagné et al., 2022).

Past research has highlighted that remote work can prevent relationship-building and communication (Allen et al., 2015; Sardeshmukh et al., 2012), though employees also report several advantages to remote work and a strong preference for it (Ninaus et al., 2021; PayScale, 2024). Given this preference, further research is needed to examine how inadequate remote working conditions, stemming from need deprivation (e.g., Cooper & Kurland, 2002; Gagné et al., 2022), relate to increased wFoMO. Explaining this link requires an additional theoretical framework.

Personality trait-based interactionist model and workplace fear of missing out

With the personality trait-based interactionist model, Tett and Burnett (2003) provided a framework to explain why personality traits result in certain work behaviours depending on (1) trait-relevant cues at the organizational, social, and task levels, and (2) anticipated intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. Past research has shown that FoMO has both trait and state components (Wegmann et al., 2017). A similar mechanism is anticipated for wFoMO and can be explained by the trait-activation model (Tett & Burnett, 2003), which we use to broaden the scope of SDT to elucidate specific cues that can result in inadequate remote work conditions. First, we argue that badly managed remote work serves as a general demand on employees akin to wFoMO at all cue levels (Tett & Burnett, 2003). At an organizational

level, remote work may be perceived as a demand when no clear remote work guidelines exist. This is linked to demands at the social and task levels, as social relations to other colleagues are harder to establish and maintain (Sardeshmukh et al., 2012), and the distribution of information may be unclear (Grant et al., 2013). In the following sections, we argue that additional trait-relevant situational features (Tett & Burnett, 2003) that reduce work-related need satisfaction create even stronger conditions for wFoMO.

Workplace fear of missing out and the need for relatedness and competence

We propose that other colleagues' work locations can act as a *releaser*, defined as 'a discrete work event that counteracts a constraint' (Tett & Burnett, 2003, p. 505). When employees work remotely, the location at which their colleagues work may serve as a social releaser, as they may be uncertain about whether in-office colleagues are collaborating, engaging in beneficial social exchanges, or experiencing events that remote employees might miss out on, all of which correspond to the need for relatedness. Moreover, colleagues' work locations may also function as a task releaser. Remote workers may be unaware of important information exchanged during conversations, creating further anxiety related to the need for competence. In terms of social comparison orientation (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999) – closely intertwined with FoMO (Verduyn et al., 2020) – such a situation can intensify wFoMO, as remote employees may fear they are missing out on more career-related opportunities compared to their colleagues (Budnick et al., 2020; Golden & Eddleston, 2020; Vander Elst et al., 2017; Wöhrmann & Ebner, 2021).

Consequently, we propose that the experience of wFoMO does not depend solely on whether one works remotely or in the office but is influenced by colleagues' work locations. For instance, when all employees work at the same location, no individual has an advantage based on their presence. However, this dynamic changes when a remote employee works alongside colleagues who are present in the office.

Considering this, we posit the following hypotheses:

> **H1.** Employees working remotely experience more wFoMO than employees working in the office.

> **H2.** The association between working location (remote vs. office) and wFoMO is moderated by the need for relatedness and the need for competence.

While those employees who work remotely experience higher levels of wFoMO, those employees who work in the office experience lower levels of wFoMO when all other colleagues work in the office.

Workplace fear of missing out and the need for autonomy

We further argue that an organizational releaser, which is related to the need for autonomy, also activates feelings of wFoMO (Tett & Burnett, 2003). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the abrupt need for people to work remotely served as such a releaser (Lapierre et al., 2016), whereas now many organizations are striving for a 'back-to-office' policy (Mende, 2024). In both cases, employees' autonomy is restricted because they cannot freely decide where to complete their tasks (Becker et al., 2022; Deci et al., 2017; Kaluza & van Dick, 2022). We posit that such restrictions result in higher levels of wFoMO, particularly when employees are forced to work remotely.

> **H3.** Employees who are forced to work remotely (unmet need for autonomy) experience higher levels of wFoMO than employees who are forced to work in an office or who can work completely flexibly.

Consequences of workplace fear of missing out

Beyond highlighting the importance of employees' need satisfaction when working remotely, this study also examines the negative consequences of wFoMO, emphasizing its relevance as a key organizational variable. Consequently, in one of our studies, we included the variables negative affect, perceived state stress, and overall work satisfaction. Changes in these variables are expected because wFoMO comes with the constant anxiety that one is missing key opportunities (Budnick et al., 2020).

Having regret for missed opportunities is linked to a variety of negative psychological outcomes. For instance, regret is associated with decreased life satisfaction, a higher likelihood of burnout, and negative affect (Lecci et al., 1994). Similarly, FoMO shows correlations with diminished overall mood (Przybylski et al., 2013) and is linked to negative affect and elevated stress levels (Milyavskaya et al., 2018). In the context of work, the adverse consequences of regret, including heightened stress perception and increased negative affect, can lead to a decrease in job satisfaction (Chaplain, 1995; Khalatbari et al., 2013). Moreover, previous studies have shown that wFoMO is negatively associated with employee well-being (Budnick et al., 2020; Reimann et al., 2023). Consequently, we argue the following:

> **H4.** Employees with higher levels of wFoMO show higher levels of negative affect (H4a) and perceived state stress (H4b), and show lower levels of work satisfaction (H4c).

We also posit that limiting employees' autonomy in choosing their work location negatively affects well-being (Grant et al., 2013; Lapierre et al., 2016). While general findings on remote work and employee health are mixed (Gajendran et al., 2024; Lunde et al., 2022), studies show that flexibility in choosing when and where to work is linked to higher job satisfaction (Becker et al., 2022). However, this finding stems from employees having choice, not from the actual use of remote work. Consequently, job satisfaction depends more on the quality than the quantity of remote work arrangements (Becker et al., 2022), suggesting that initial benefits may fade if employees lack autonomy over their work location (Kaluza & van Dick, 2022). Thus, we postulate:

> **H5.** Employees who must involuntarily work remotely experience higher levels of negative affect (H5a), higher levels of perceived state stress (H5b), and lower levels of work satisfaction (H5c).

Above, we hypothesize that wFoMO is more pronounced during involuntary remote work compared to involuntary office work or flexible work location choices (H3) and that wFoMO is directly linked to work-related outcomes (H4a–c). We expect that these outcomes are also directly triggered by involuntary remote work (H5a–c). Thus, we propose that the intensity of wFoMO also mediates the relationship between the flexibility of one's work location and well-being. Therefore, we present the following:

> **H6.** The autonomy to choose one's work location (involuntarily working remotely versus in the office vs. flexible work location) indirectly influences negative affect (H6a), perceived state stress (H6b), and work satisfaction (H6c) via wFoMO.

OVERVIEW OF STUDIES

We conducted three studies that build on one another to answer our research questions and to test our hypotheses. Study 1 adopted a preliminary cross-sectional approach to provide initial correlational and qualitative evidence concerning the link between the interplay of remote work, need satisfaction, and wFoMO, answering RQ1. By including an open question, we explored why employees choose to work in

the office, identifying elements of office work that fulfil relatedness, competence, and autonomy needs. We used the results of Study 1 to construct the two subsequent experimental vignette studies. Both Study 2 and Study 3 focused on different needs according to SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2002) that may be harder to fulfil when working remotely. The vignettes were built by considering the qualitative answers from Study 1 and represent releasers in the context of the trait-activation model (Tett & Burnett, 2003). Study 2 focused on relational and informational dynamics that may affect wFoMO during remote work (i.e., implementing a social/task releaser), addressing H1, H2 and RQ2. Study 3 shifted to the unmet need for autonomy (i.e., implementing an organizational releaser) and employee well-being outcomes that tackled H3–H6c and RQ2. Refer to Figure 1 and Table 1 for a more detailed overview of how the studies complement each other.

STUDY 1

Method

Procedure

A cross-sectional exploratory study was performed via SoSci Survey (https://www.soscisurvey.de/). Participants accessed the study through a link posted on social media sites, such as Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn. After giving informed consent, participants answered an open question about their main motivation to work from the office. This question was coded later in the process. We also assessed several questions regarding participants' working situation (e.g., weekly working hours, home office frequency).

Participants

A total of 120 participants completed the questionnaire. However, we excluded four participants because they stated that they never work remotely, two because they did not reach the last page of the questionnaire, and one because of an unrealistically high number of weekly working hours. Therefore, the final sample consisted of 113 participants (male = 37, female = 74, other = 2). The mean age was 31.58 years (SD = 11.65). All participants were employed: 46.90% had full-time employment, 15.93% part-time employment, and 27.43% were working students. The rest of the sample (9.73%) did something else. The mean regular working hours were 29.94 hours per week (SD = 11.96), with a mean percentage of remote work of 42.03% (SD = 32.18).

Measures

The questionnaire consisted of a qualitative item ('What is your main motivation for going to the office for work?') and several quantitative measures presented in a randomized order. If not stated otherwise, all measures were answered on a 5-point Likert scale with 1 = *least agreement* to 5 = *highest agreement*.

wFoMO

To assess wFoMO, we utilized a questionnaire developed by Budnick et al. (2020) and translated into German by Reimann et al. (2023). Five items each measured the dimension of informational exclusion (e.g., 'I worry that I might miss out on valuable work-related information') and relational exclusion (e.g., 'I worry that I will miss out on networking opportunities that my coworkers will have'). Notably, both dimensions demonstrated satisfying reliability coefficients (informational exclusion: $\alpha = .76$; relational exclusion: $\alpha = .93$).

Remote work frequency

The frequency of remote work was assessed using a self-developed item asking participants to estimate what percentage of their average working time they spend working remotely. Responses ranged from 0 to 100%.

Remote work preference

To measure participants' preference for working remotely, we adapted the four-item segmentation preferences scale developed by Kreiner (2006) to fit the context of remote work (e.g., 'I enjoy working from home'). Satisfactory reliability was reported ($\alpha = .87$).

Remote work flexibility

Participants' flexibility to work remotely was assessed by one item asking whether they have the flexibility to work remotely. The scale ranged from 1 = *no flexibility* to 4 = *full flexibility*.

Presence of other colleagues at work

The frequency of other colleagues working remotely was assessed using a self-developed item asking participants to estimate the percentage of their colleagues in the office on an average working day. Responses ranged from 0 to 100%.

Statistical analyses

All statistical analyses were performed with RStudio (Posit team, 2024). After general data preparation, we calculated mean scores for both wFoMO dimensions, remote work preference, and flexibility. The variables for one's own and colleagues' remote work frequency consisted only of one item and were directly incorporated in the analyses. With these variables, we calculated correlational analyses to gain initial evidence for our overall research question. Moreover, we used a coding guide to analyse the qualitative item (see additional material at OSF via https://osf.io/cvk68/?view_only=367d41ea130c4a4982e89307e1f35a8d).

Results

Qualitative analysis

Two independent raters used the coding guide to analyse the results of the qualitative item. The question referred to participants' main motivation for coming into the office for work. Table 2 illustrates how often each category was named and gives the interrater reliability between both raters. According to a classification by Altman (1990), the interrater reliabilities were good for all three response categories: (1) Social aspects: People work in offices to meet social needs, including working and interacting with colleagues. (2) Instrumental aspects: Participants mentioned instrumental reasons to go into the office, including efficiency, access to better resources, communication, peace and quiet, exercise, and productivity. (3) Other psychological aspects: Participants mentioned psychological aspects (besides the

TABLE 2 Statistics regarding the qualitative item of Study 1.

Response category	Frequency of mention in percent	Cohens kappa *K*
Social aspects	70.67	.93
Instrumental aspects	50.44	.81
Other psychological aspects	38.15	.91

Note: Percentages are calculated as the average of the two independent raters.

TABLE 3 Descriptive statistics and correlational matrix of Study 1.

wFoMO	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1 Informational	2.76	1.15	–				
2 Relational	2.25	1.05	.61***	–			
3 Remote Preference	3.56	1.12	−.47***	−.28**	–		
4 Remote Frequency	42.03	32.18	−.30**	−.16	.48***	–	
5 Remote Flexibility	3.03	.94	.02	.20*	−.20*	.34***	–
6 Colleagues	55.06	27.12	.33***	.21*	−.17	−.50***	−.30**

Note: Colleagues = percentage of other colleagues working from the office.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

satisfaction of social needs) that relate to personal feelings associated with working on site and result in a more pleasant way of working, including a good working environment and atmosphere, motivation, focus, and variety.

Correlational analyses

We analysed the correlations between all variables (see Table 3), revealing that informational wFoMO was significantly negatively associated with employees' remote work preference and frequency. Relational wFoMO was only significantly negatively associated with remote work preference and not frequency. Interestingly, no association was revealed between informational wFoMO and remote work flexibility, but a positive significant association was found between relational wFoMO and remote work flexibility. The percentage of colleagues who come to the office was positively correlated with both wFoMO dimensions. Moreover, significant negative relationships were revealed between participants' own remote work frequency and flexibility and the percentage of colleagues who come to the office.

Discussion study 1

This study explored associations between wFoMO and remote work aspects. The informational, but not relational, wFoMO dimension was significantly negatively associated with the actual remote work frequency. Although this seems contradictory to our argument, it reflects associations for situations after a choice has already been made. Therefore, it is not surprising that employees with generally higher wFoMO choose to work in the office more often, while employees with lower wFoMO feel more confident working remotely, as they are likely less anxious.

Furthermore, wFoMO was negatively associated with remote work preference, suggesting that individuals who enjoy working remotely are less prone to experiencing wFoMO, possibly because their psychological needs are more effectively met in this work arrangement. Considering SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2002), the link between relational wFoMO and remote work preference points towards unmet relatedness needs in remote settings. Our finding corresponds with empirical findings that relational concerns (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Sardeshmukh et al., 2012) influence employees' desire to work remotely, and it highlights the social aspect of work environments, as the presence or absence of colleagues can significantly influence feelings of missing out (Grant et al., 2013; Kurland & Bailey, 2000). Similarly, the negative relationship between informational wFoMO and remote work preference may reflect concerns about competence – specifically, fears of missing crucial information that supports effective performance.

Our qualitative analysis supports these conclusions. Employees often cite social reasons for being in the office, such that remote work may not fulfil employees' need for relatedness. Participants also mentioned instrumental advantages, highlighting a link with competence needs.

Furthermore, we revealed a positive link between relational wFoMO and remote work flexibility. This should be interpreted alongside the positive relationship between wFoMO and colleagues' work locations. While flexibility supports autonomy (Gajendran et al., 2024), it also implies that all colleagues are flexible. According to the trait-activation model (Tett & Burnett, 2003), feelings of uncertainty may be triggered and act as an organizational releaser.

STUDY 2

Method

Procedure

A pre-registered experimental online study was performed at https://aspredicted.org/gq9q-nbsx.pdf.[1] First, we asked participants to put themselves into one of four vignette scenarios that differed regarding work location (remote vs. office) and the number of colleagues present in the office (50% vs. 100%). The vignettes were randomly presented in a between-person design. After that, participants answered a control question ('Please indicate where you work in the scenario described and how many of your colleagues are located in the office'). Participants were only included in the data analysis if their responses matched the presented vignette. Finally, participants answered the wFoMO questionnaire and some demographic questions.

Participants

We performed an a priori sample size estimation with G*Power (Faul et al., 2007). For a power of .95, a minimum sample size of $N = 119$ was determined to detect effects with an effect size $f = .15$ and an alpha of .05. Participants accessed the study via a link shared on social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn. Moreover, the study was shared at University XY via flyers and asked for working students to also participate in the experiment. Initially, $N = 289$ participants finished the questionnaire. However, we excluded 37 participants for failing the control question or withholding data consent, resulting in a final sample of $N = 252$ (female = 186, male = 64, did not reveal = 2). The mean age of the sample was 36.60 years (SD = 16.14). Among participants, 154 were employed, 87 were working students, and 11 reported other primary activities (e.g., working as a freelancer).[2] For those in employment, 27.60% stated that they only worked remotely (work location did not matter at all), 31.30% only worked in the office, and 41.10% worked in a hybrid working arrangement. We conducted ANOVAs and a χ^2-test for all demographic variables and did not find significant differences between participants in each of the four vignettes. Please visit OSF for the full statistics regarding these results.

Measures and materials

Four vignettes were used that differed regarding the location of the participant (office vs. remote) and the number of colleagues who worked in the office that day (50% vs. 100%). In each scenario, the head of the parent company gives a presentation, followed by a joint lunch break with all employees who are in the office. The four combinations resulting from this design are shown in Table 4.

[1]Self-efficacy served as an additional outcome variable in the original study, as it was part of another project; the results for self-efficacy are reported in the additional material on OSF.

[2]Please note that we reran the main analyses by only including the currently employed participants. Results can be found on OSF.

TABLE 4 Overview of the vignettes of Study 2.

	Independent variable: Work location		Moderator: Percentage of colleagues working in the office	
	Office	Remote	50	100
Vignette 1	x		x	
Vignette 2	x			x
Vignette 3		x	x	
Vignette 4		x		x

Prior research suggests that these vignettes adequately tackle both the need for relatedness and competence. Specifically, relatedness is addressed due to the remote conditions and the separation from half or all of one's colleagues, creating a sense of isolation (Gagné et al., 2022). Competence was manipulated because 'remotely working' participants may have more difficulty understanding important information, have more trouble discerning their colleagues' subtle cues, and may feel more reluctant to ask questions themselves (see Gagné et al., 2022 on technological hassles) than if they were in the office. We focused on both needs in a single vignette study, as their satisfaction is intertwined because identical cues may be interpreted differently based on individual differences. The exact formulation of each vignette can be found on OSF via https://osf.io/cvk68/?view_only=367d41ea130c4a4982e89307e1f35a8d.

Importantly, participants were instructed to base their responses solely on the situation described in the vignette—regardless of their current employment status or personal work experience. Given the hypothetical but realistic nature of the vignettes, participants' current employment status was not a prerequisite for meaningful engagement with the task. In fact, previous research shows individuals can reliably and validly respond to hypothetical scenarios, even ones that do not reflect their personal context, when scenarios are clearly described and instructions are explicit (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014).

Again, the same wFoMO measure from Budnick et al. (2020) served as the outcome variable (see Study 1). The items were slightly adapted to fit the vignette (e.g., 'In the scenario described, I would worry that I might miss out on valuable work-related information'). Satisfactory reliability coefficients were reported for both subscales (informational: $a = .97$; relational: $a = .96$). We performed confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and compared the one-factor solution to the two-factor solution. Results indicate a better fit for the two-factor solution (vignette 1: $\chi^2(34) = 80.18$, $p < .001$, CFI = .94, TLI = .92, SRMR = .03; vignette 2: $\chi^2(34) = 136.19$, $p < .001$, CFI = .92, TLI = .89, SRMR = .02; vignette 3: $\chi^2(34) = 75.68$, $p < .001$, CFI = .93, TLI = .91, SRMR = .07; vignette 4: $\chi^2(34) = 83.76$, $p < .001$, CFI = .93, TLI = .91, SRMR = .10).

Statistical analyses

We used RStudio for data analysis (Posit team, 2024). All hypotheses were tested using path modelling by maximum likelihood estimation with lavaan (Rosseel et al., 2012). This allowed us to differentiate between both wFoMO subdimensions simultaneously as outcomes. The vignettes were dummy coded to distinguish between the office versus remote and the 50% versus 100% of colleagues working in the office scenarios. With both dummy variables, we performed a moderation analysis using bootstrapping with $m = 10{,}000$.

Results

The descriptive statistics and the correlational matrix are presented in Tables 5 and 6, respectively.

TABLE 5 Means and standard deviations of wFoMO for each condition of Study 2.

			wFoMO					
			Overall		Informational		Relational	
Condition		*N*	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
1	Office: 50% Colleagues	51	2.01	1.07	1.89	1.10	2.13	1.17
2	Office: 100% Colleagues	64	1.58	.86	1.53	.92	1.63	.86
3	Remote: 50% Colleagues	65	3.14	.87	3.02	1.04	3.27	.99
4	Remote: 100% Colleagues	72	3.59	.85	3.56	.98	3.62	1.03

Note: 50%/100% Colleagues = either 50% or 100% of other colleagues' work in the office.

TABLE 6 Correlational matrix of both wFoMO subdimensions, both dummy variables, age, and gender of Study 2.

	1	2	3	4	5
1 Informational wFoMO	–				
2 Relational wFoMO	.77*	–			
3 Remote dummy	.62*	.62*	–		
4 Colleagues dummy	.03	−.03	−.03	–	
5 Age	.03	−.01	.02	.02	–
6 Gender dummy	.03	.06	−.02	.05	.28*

Note: Remote Dummy: 0 = work in the office, 1 = work remotely; Colleagues Dummy: 0 = 50% of the other colleagues work from the office, 1 = 100% of the other colleagues work from the office; Gender Dummy: 0 = male, 1 = female.

*$p < .001$.

Hypotheses tests

As the path model to test our hypotheses was saturated, the fit indices cannot be interpreted. Our first hypothesis stating that employees working remotely experience more wFoMO than employees working in the office (H1) was supported. Both wFoMO subdimensions were significantly higher for those participants in the two remote vignettes compared to those in the two office vignettes, informational wFoMO: $B = 1.12$, SE = .20, $p < .001$, CI [.711, 1.504], relational wFoMO: $B = 1.14$, SE = .20, $p < .001$, CI [.736, 1.524]. The second hypothesis assumed that the number of colleagues who work in the office moderates the association between the working location and wFoMO (H2). Again, this hypothesis was supported for both wFoMO subdimensions, informational wFoMO: $B = .91$, SE = .26, $p < .001$, CI [.386, 1.424], relational wFoMO: $B = .86$, SE = .26, $p = .001$, CI [.330, 1.362]. See Figure 2 for an overview of the full path model and Figure 3 for an illustration of the moderating effect between the employee's work location and the number of other colleagues working in the office.

Discussion study 2

Our results show that employees experience higher levels of wFoMO when working remotely. Specifically, remote work significantly heightens concerns about missing important information and social interactions (Kossen & van der Berg, 2022), particularly in situations involving social and task releasers (Tett & Burnett, 2003). These releasers were represented by the number of colleagues present in the office, moderating the relationship between one's own work location and wFoMO. Specifically, in the office scenarios, higher levels of wFoMO were experienced when only 50% of the other colleagues were working in the office (compared to 100%). By contrast, in the remote scenarios, higher levels of wFoMO were reported when 100% of the other colleagues were working in the office. These results stress the importance of the need for relatedness when investigating work location effects on

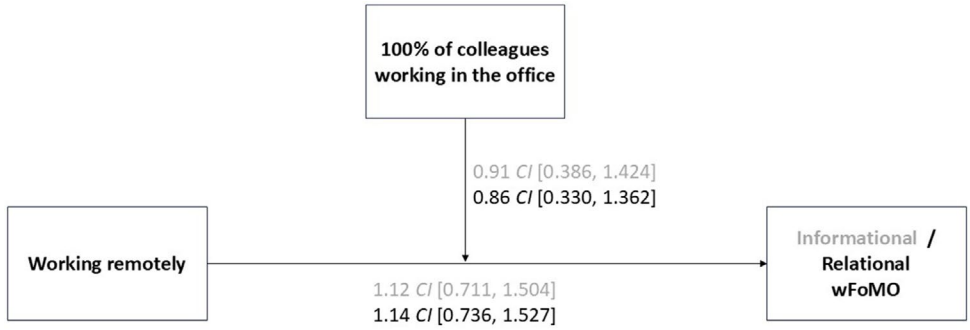

FIGURE 2 Overview of the path model of Study 2. Values in light grey represent the results for informational wFoMO; values in black represent the results for relational wFoMO. Reference category for the independent variable is working from the office with M = 1.89 (SE = .15) for informational wFoMO and M = 2.13 (SE = .16) for relational wFoMO; reference category for the moderating variable is 50% of colleagues working in the office with M = −.36 (SE = .19) for informational wFoMO and M = −.51 (SD = .20) for relational wFoMO.

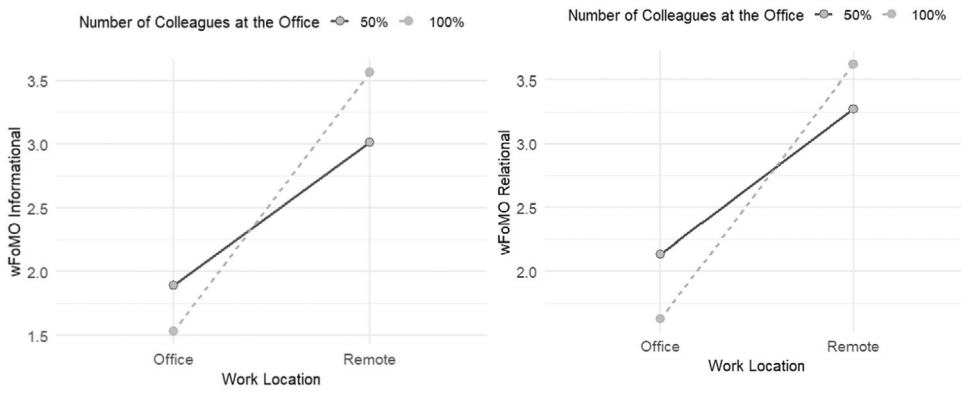

FIGURE 3 Interaction diagrams for both wFoMO subdimensions of Study 2.

wFoMO, with consistently stronger effects when employees are apart from their colleagues. They also emphasize the need for competence, as accessing information is harder when working remotely. This aligns with past studies exploring the costs of remote work (Ferreira et al., 2021; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007) but extends them by providing causal evidence focused on wFoMO.

STUDY 3

Method

Procedure

The study was pre-registered at https://aspredicted.org/Z2S_GD8.[3] After receiving information about the study and providing informed consent, the participants were randomly assigned to one of the three vignette scenarios: (1) forced to work remotely (experimental group); (2) forced to work in the office

[3]We also conducted moderated mediational analyses where we hypothesized that general need satisfaction was the moderating variable. However, reporting these findings exceeds the scope of this paper.

(control group 1); (3) flexibility to choose one's work location (control group 2). See the supplementary material on OSF for the exact wording of the vignettes via https://osf.io/cvk68/?view_only=367d41ea130c4a4982e89307e1f35a8d. Prior literature has indicated that having no flexibility to choose one's own work location, specifically when an employer determines the location from which an employee must work, threatens employees' need for autonomy (Gagné et al., 2022; Lapierre et al., 2016). To ensure participants read the vignettes carefully, an attention check was included. Finally, participants answered the questionnaires that served as the dependent variables (wFoMO, negative affect, perceived state stress, work satisfaction) as well as demographic variables. Again, participants were explicitly instructed to base their responses solely on the situation described in the vignette (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014) and ignore their own current work situation.

Participants

Prior to data collection, the required sample size was determined using G*Power (Faul et al., 2007). Assuming a medium effect ($f = .25$) and using the bootstrapping method, $N = 400$ participants was determined sufficient to achieve a power of .95. We performed the same recruitment procedure as in Study 2. A total of $N = 619$ participants answered the online questionnaire, of which we excluded 112 participants because they withheld data consent or failed the attention check. Therefore, the final sample consisted of $N = 507$ participants (male = 35.11%; female = 64.89%), and ages ranged from 18 to 72 (M = 29.40; SD = 12.42). Most participants stated that they had some kind of school-leaving certificate ($n = 235$), had finished professional training ($n = 55$), had a bachelor's or master's degree ($n = 214$), or had a PhD ($n = 3$). In total, 44.38% of participants reported that their main occupation was to work either full- or part-time, while 55.23% were working students, housewives, or housemen, looking for work, or already retired. Overall, 58.57% of participants stated that they performed another occupation besides their main occupation, which indicates that a total of 372 participants of the sample were employed.[4] We conducted a χ^2-test and ANOVAs to test whether the participants assigned to the three vignettes differed in terms of demographic data. No significant differences were observed. Please refer to OSF for the detailed statistics of these tests.

Measures

Independent variable

The three vignette scenarios served as the independent variables. To eliminate potential biases, we carefully formulated the vignettes to be as uniform and linguistically similar as possible, ensuring that only the intended variables were manipulated. The first vignette illustrated a situation in which the employee was obliged to work remotely. The employer determined whether and when the employee was permitted to work in the office. The second vignette (control group 1) described a scenario that involved involuntary and inflexible office work, with the employer deciding whether and when the employee was allowed to work remotely. The third vignette served as another control (control group 2), where employees had a flexible work model in which they were free to choose their work location.

Outcome variables

Participants were asked to respond to all outcome variables based on the vignette they had just read, with questionnaires constantly reminding participants to place themselves in the scenario.

[4]Please note that we reran the main analyses by only including the currently employed participants. Results can be found on OSF via https://osf.io/cvk68/files/osfstorage?view_only=367d41ea130c4a4982e89307e1f35a8d.

wFoMO was measured using the same wFoMO Scale (Budnick et al., 2020) as in Study 2, again with satisfactory reliability coefficients ranging from $a = .94$ to $a = .96$ for relational exclusion and $a = .90$–$.96$ for informational exclusion.

Using the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) by Watson et al. (1988), 10 items measured negative affect (e.g., 'In the described scenario, I would feel distressed'). The items were phrased in the subjunctive mood to align with the vignettes. Responses were recorded from 1 to 5 = *extremely*. The internal consistency varied across different vignettes, $a = .82$–$.89$.

Current job-related stress was measured using the 10-item Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) by Cohen et al. (1983) translated into German by Schneider et al. (2020). Participants responded using a 5-point Likert scale with anchor points ranging from 1 = *does not apply at all* to 5 = *applies completely* (e.g., 'In the described scenario, I would feel upset because something unexpected happened'). Reliability ranged from $a = .82$–$.86$.

We measured work satisfaction using the scale by Cammann et al. (1983) translated by Ivens (2018). Three items (e.g., 'In the described scenario, I would generally enjoy working at my company') were answered on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. Reliability coefficients were $a = .81$–$.90$.

Statistical analyses

The software RStudio (Posit team, 2024) and the package lavaan (Rosseel et al., 2012) were used for analyses. Path modelling with maximum likelihood estimation tested the hypotheses.[5] H3 and H5a–c examined direct effects between the categorical exogenous variable on both wFoMO dimensions and well-being (negative affect, perceived stress, and work satisfaction); H4a–c assessed direct effects from wFoMO on well-being indicators. Lastly, H6a–c analysed the indirect effects via wFoMO on well-being. Bootstrapping with $m = 10{,}000$ was used in all analyses.

Results

Descriptive statistics and the correlational matrix are illustrated in Tables 7 and 8, respectively. When comparing the vignette scenarios, both wFoMO dimensions scored higher in the experimental group than in both control groups. However, in the scenario where participants imagined involuntarily working from the office (control group 1), participants reported the highest levels of perceived stress and negative affect, and the lowest level of work satisfaction. This pattern was maintained but less extreme for the experimental group.

Hypotheses tests

We analysed a path model that tested all hypotheses at the same time. The final model was saturated, so the fit indices cannot be interpreted. In H3, we assumed that involuntarily working remotely would be negatively associated with wFoMO. Indeed, the results of the path model showed that the mean value of both wFoMO subdimensions was significantly lower in both control groups than in the experimental condition, with $B = -1.08$, SE = .10, CI [−1.277, −.878] for control group 1 and $B = -.45$, SE = .13, CI [−.677, −.226] for control group 2 for informational wFoMO and with $B = -.98$, SE = .12, CI [−1.198, −.747] for control group 1 and $B = -.39$, SE = .11, CI [−.608, −.169] for control group 2 for relational wFoMO. H3 is supported.

[5]This procedure differs from the preregistration, in which analyses were planned using the PROCESS macro in RStudio. However, we decided to use SEM instead because (1) it provides benefits when considering categorical exogenous variables, (2) it allowed us to test both wFoMO subdimensions together, and (3) it allowed us to test all endogenous variables together.

TABLE 7 Means and standard deviations of all scales grouped for each vignette scenario of Study 3.

	Full sample		Experimental group		Control group 1		Control group 2	
	M	**SD**	**M**	**SD**	**M**	**SD**	**M**	**SD**
Age[a]	29.40	12.42	28.74	12.13	30.46	13.72	28.85	10.87
Gender[a]	1.65	.48	1.70	.46	1.61	.49	1.64	.48
wFoMO								
Informational	2.53	1.09	3.05	1.04	1.97	.91	2.60	1.03
Relational	2.73	1.14	3.20	1.10	2.22	1.10	2.80	.94
Negative affect	1.81	.67	1.89	.74	2.01	.64	1.43	.44
Stress	2.85	.70	2.97	.71	2.99	.65	2.51	.64
Work satisfaction	4.34	1.33	4.10	1.35	3.95	1.16	5.20	1.14

Note: Experimental Group = involuntarily work remotely; Control Group 1 = involuntarily work in the office; Control Group 2 = full flexibility to choose work location.

[a]We calculated an ANOVA and a chi-squared test to ensure that there were no statistically significant differences regarding age and gender between the three groups.

TABLE 8 Correlational matrix of all variables of Study 3.

	1	2	3	4	5
wFoMO					
1. Informational	–				
2. Relational	.64*	–			
3. Negative affect	.33*	.33*	–		
4. Stress	.35*	.34*	.69*	–	
5. Work satisfaction	−.20*	−.15*	−.59*	−.67*	–

Note: The correlational matrix shows the mean values of all three vignettes combined.

*$p < .001$.

Moreover, we hypothesized that employees with high wFoMO would experience higher negative affect (H4a) and perceived stress (H4b) and lower work satisfaction (H4c). These hypotheses were supported, as the direct effect from both wFoMO dimensions on each endogenous variable reached significance: informational wFoMO → negative affect: $B = .19$, SE = .03, CI [.130, .251]; relational wFoMO → negative affect: $B = .15$, SE = .03, CI [.096, .208]; informational wFoMO → perceived stress: $B = .20$, SE = .03, CI [.135, .267]; relational wFoMO → perceived stress: $B = .15$, SE = .03, CI [.083, .206]; informational wFoMO → work satisfaction: $B = -.30$, SE = .07, CI [−.428, −.164]; relational wFoMO → work satisfaction: $B = -.09$, SE = .06, CI [−.213, −.029].

To answer H5a–c, we examined the direct effects between the exogenous and endogenous variables. The analyses revealed that the mean value for negative affect was significantly higher for the first control group (involuntarily working in the office; $B = .47$, SE = .07, CI [.331, .595]) but significantly lower for control group 2 (flexible work condition; $B = -.31$, SE = .05, CI [−.417, −.208]). The same tendency was revealed for perceived stress. The mean value for perceived stress was significantly higher for those working involuntarily in the office ($B = .38$, SE = .08, CI [.223, .529]) and significantly lower for those with flexible working conditions ($B = -.31$, SE = .07, CI [−.438, −.186]) compared to those working involuntarily remotely. For work satisfaction, a similar pattern was shown but reversed. The mean value for control group 1 was significantly lower (involuntarily working in the office; $B = -.56$, SE = .15, CI [−.850, −.270]) compared to the experimental condition while significantly higher for control group 2 (flexible work condition; $B = .93$, SE = .13, CI [.665, 1.183]). Therefore, H5a–c are partially supported.

We analysed the indirect effects to determine whether employees who involuntarily work remotely experience higher levels of negative affect and perceived stress as well as lower levels of work satisfaction mediated by wFoMO. All indirect effects reached significance, and H6a–c are, therefore, supported. See Table 9 for an overview of the mediation effects and full statistics of the indirect effects.

Discussion study 3

Study 3 built upon Study 2's examination of relatedness and competence needs, investigating whether changes in work-related autonomy influenced wFoMO. The present study expanded the body of knowledge by adding well-being variables. First, our analysis suggests that involuntarily working remotely is negatively associated with both dimensions of wFoMO. Specifically, participants in both control groups exhibited significantly lower levels of wFoMO compared to those in the experimental condition. This finding underscores the potential benefits of workplace flexibility (Gajendran et al., 2024; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007) and suggests that being externally forced to work remotely elevates feelings of being disconnected from workplace dynamics.

We also revealed significant differences between all groups regarding negative affect, perceived stress, and work satisfaction. While wFoMO was highest in the experimental condition (involuntarily working remotely), well-being was lowest in control group 1 (involuntarily working in the office). This finding shows that both involuntarily working remotely and in the office are negatively related to employee well-being, whereas a higher degree of workplace location autonomy is perceived as positive. Being forced to work in the office seems to be perceived as worse than being forced to work remotely.

Moreover, we found that higher wFoMO is linked to increased negative affect and perceived stress and decreased work satisfaction, showing that feelings of exclusion or isolation can hamper employee well-being. This aligns with existing literature indicating that wFoMO is associated with reduced employee well-being (Reimann et al., 2023), thereby potentially impairing overall productivity and job satisfaction (Anderson et al., 2015; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007).

Lastly, our study revealed that all indirect pathways reached significance, amplifying our understanding that wFoMO serves as a crucial mediator of how low workplace autonomy impacts employee well-being. This highlights the need for a deeper exploration of remote work policies that might unwittingly reinforce potential negative effects.

OVERALL DISCUSSION

Remote work has transformed organizational dynamics, offering possibilities that many employees value (Ferreira et al., 2021; Gajendran et al., 2024). However, poorly managed remote work can prevent work-related need satisfaction (Deci & Ryan, 2002). This paper highlights wFoMO as an important variable in this context that aligns with prior literature on its association with employee well-being (Budnick et al., 2020; Reimann et al., 2023).

Study 1 revealed that wFoMO is negatively associated with remote work variables such as frequency (for informational wFoMO only), preference, and co-worker presence in the office. Remote work flexibility was positively associated only with relational wFoMO. This evidence reveals that remote work does not inherently increase wFoMO (1) on the between-person level and (2) when considering existing job choices. According to the trait-activation model (Tett & Burnett, 2003), remote work alone may not be a triggering condition (dynamic interaction); rather, poorly managed remote work serves as a releaser to create strong situations that activate wFoMO. Accordingly, our first research question can be answered positively.

Building on these considerations and findings, our subsequent experimental studies delved deeper into the needs posited by SDT that employees may be deprived of when working under poorly

TABLE 9 Statistics of the full path model of Study 3.

				95% *CI*		
	B	**SE**	***p***	**LL**	**UL**	***β***
wFoMO informational						
Intercept	3.05	.08	<.001	2.900	3.198	2.80
Control Group 1 (a1)	−1.08	.10	<.001	−1.277	−.878	−.48
Control Group 2 (a2)	−.45	.12	<.001	−.677	−.226	−.18
wFoMO relational						
Intercept	3.20	.08	<.001	3.035	3.354	2.81
Control Group 1 (i1)	−.98	.12	<.001	−1.198	−.747	−.41
Control Group 2 (i2)	−.39	.11	.001	−.608	−.169	−.15
Negative affect						
Intercept	.83	.09	<.001	.650	1.019	1.24
Control Group 1 (c1)	.47	.07	<.001	.331	.595	.34
Control Group 2 (c2)	−.31	.05	<.001	−.417	−.208	−.21
wFoMO inf (b1)	.19	.03	<.001	.130	.251	.31
wFoMO rel (b2)	.15	.03	<.001	.096	.208	.26
a1 * b1	−.21	.04	<.001	−.290	−.132	−.15
i1 * b2	−.15	.03	<.001	−.222	−.089	−.11
a2 * b1	−.09	.03	.001	−.145	−.041	−.06
i2 * b2	−.06	.02	.005	−.109	−.025	−.04
Perceived stress						
Intercept	1.89	.12	<.001	1.659	2.136	2.70
Control group 1 (d1)	.38	.08	<.001	.223	.529	.26
Control group 2 (d2)	−.31	.07	<.001	−.438	−.186	−.20
wFoMO inf (b3)	.20	.03	<.001	.135	.267	.32
wFoMO rel (b4)	.15	.03	<.001	.083	.206	.24
a1 * b3	−.22	.04	<.001	−.310	−.138	−.15
i1 * b4	−.14	.04	<.001	−.220	−.077	−.10
a2 * b3	−.09	.03	.001	−.156	−.044	−.06
i2 * b4	−.06	.02	.009	−.108	−.022	−.04
Work satisfaction						
Intercept	5.30	.24	<.001	4.814	5.743	3.97
Control Group 1 (e1)	−.56	.15	<.001	−.850	−.270	−.20
Control Group 2 (e2)	.93	.13	<.001	.665	1.183	.31
wFoMO inf (b5)	−.30	.07	<.001	−.428	−.164	−.25
wFoMO rel (b6)	−.09	.06	.154	−.213	.029	−.08
a1 * b5	.32	.08	<.001	.173	.495	.12
i1 * b6	.09	.06	.161	−.026	.215	.03
a2 * b5	.13	.05	.005	.057	.246	.05
i2 * b6	.04	.03	.202	−.007	.103	.01

Note: Intercepts represent the mean value of the reference category (experimental group/involuntarily working remotely); Control Group 1 = involuntarily working from the office; Control Group 2 = flexible work location.

managed remote conditions (Gagné et al., 2022): Study 2 highlighted that lack of co-worker presence – addressing the need for relatedness and competence – heightens wFoMO. Study 3 found that lacking autonomy over one's work location is crucial in increasing wFoMO and undermining well-being. Therefore, the second research question can be answered positively, as our vignette studies indicate that all three needs tackled by situational cues serve as releasers that enhance wFoMO (Tett & Burnett, 2003).

Theoretical contributions

This article contributes to our theoretical understanding of the two main theories that were incorporated, namely, SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2002) and the trait-activation model (Tett & Burnett, 2003), by demonstrating wFoMO as a new challenge that arises from need deprivation due to poor remote work conditions. Focusing on variables such as wFoMO is a meaningful contribution, as past research has often focused on SDT and work-related need satisfaction in the context of employee well-being (Becker et al., 2022; Brunelle & Fortin, 2021; Perry et al., 2018). By experimentally manipulating remote work conditions addressing the degree of work-related need fulfillment, our study offers causal insights that advance beyond the correlational findings of former studies (Gajendran et al., 2024).

Our findings extend SDT-based theoretical propositions that remote work can enhance but also diminish need satisfaction (Gagné et al., 2022). We build on this by introducing wFoMO as a key outcome of need deprivation in remote settings. Considering wFoMO is important, as traditional constructs may not fully capture the complexities of today's remote work realities. By combining SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2002) with the trait-activation model (Tett & Burnett, 2003), we offer a framework to understand how unmet needs can trigger wFoMO and, in turn, reduce well-being.

Specifically, by incorporating the trait-activation model, we demonstrate how situational cues of remote work environments can act as releasers that activate wFoMO as a trait-relevant response (Tett & Burnett, 2003). In doing so, we show that remote work can be experienced very differently: Depending on the social, informational, or structural cues embedded in remote work environments, employees may feel prone to wFoMO. This offers a theoretical bridge between the trait-activation model and SDT by showing how such cues not only activate trait-relevant responses but do so specifically when they threaten psychological needs.

Our findings align with prior research suggesting that the need for relatedness – specifically the need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Leary et al., 2013) – is central to (w)FoMO. However, another recent study by Brunelle and Fortin (2021) found that teleworkers score higher on the need for relatedness than office workers, which is contradictory to our findings, SDT-based propositions, and past findings (van Zoonen & Sivunen, 2022; Wang et al., 2021). Notably, the participants in Brunelle and Fortin's (2021) study had a special telework programme, possibly explaining the discrepancy. Alternatively, those preferring remote work may initially score higher on (relatedness) need satisfaction.

Beyond relatedness, the need for competence and autonomy are also important in the work context. First, in Study 2, we addressed competence along with relatedness, as both needs may be closely intertwined: While co-worker presence is important for relatedness via interpersonal connections, co-workers are also involved in informational exchange and feedback. Second, the need for autonomy was addressed in Study 3 by including vignettes that restricted employees' work location. While wFoMO was highest under involuntarily remote work, well-being was lowest under involuntarily office work. This aligns with past studies on autonomy and well-being (Golden et al., 2008; Perry et al., 2018) and extends them by linking autonomy to wFoMO.

Our multimethod approach across the three studies strengthens the robustness and theoretical impact of our findings.

Limitations and directions for future research

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting these findings. The first limitation refers to the preliminary findings of Study 1, which relied solely on correlational data. This limits causal inference and constrains interpretability. The associations between remote work variables and wFoMO are more complex than captured here.

The next limitation refers to the generalizability of our subsequent findings: Study 2 and Study 3 were conducted under highly controlled conditions, which may not fully reflect the complexities of real-world scenarios. Employee experiences in remote work involve a dynamic interplay of various factors that can affect need satisfaction, activation of wFoMO, and well-being. To enhance the validity of the findings, longitudinal field studies are recommended. By tracking these variables in more naturalistic settings, researchers can better understand their interrelationships and how they evolve as remote work conditions change.

Another limitation concerns simplifications in the vignettes. Participants responded to wFoMO and well-being measures based solely on brief, hypothetical scenarios, which do not reflect the complexity of real-life decisions about remote work. For example, factors such as reducing costs may influence an employee's decision to work remotely. Furthermore, our studies did not consider the satisfaction of general/private needs. As the dynamics of remote work environments (e.g., involving partners, children, or pets) may be more complex, future research should incorporate such measures. For example, one's private need for relatedness might be better met via remote work, such that less interaction with colleagues might be less problematic (see 'spillover theory', Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000).

The next limitation addresses our choice to include currently non-employed and working student participants in the vignette studies. We chose to do so according to best practice instructions (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014) stating that individuals are generally able to empathize with diverse scenarios with clear descriptions and instructions. We argue that our study offered this clarity, as our scenarios were short and constantly reminded participants to base their responses solely on the vignettes. Nevertheless, to assess the robustness of our findings, we conducted follow-up analyses that excluded working students.

These additional analyses (reported in full on OSF) revealed no notable changes for Study 2. However, for Study 3, some deviations from the main analyses emerged. Specifically, some effects regarding the experimental condition (forced remote work) and control condition 2 (flexible work) were no longer statistically significant. This divergence may have several explanations. First, excluding working students resulted in a substantial reduction of the sample size – nearly half of the original sample – which reduced the statistical power of the complex path model, limiting the ability to detect smaller effects. Second, cohort or age-related differences may have influenced participants' responses, particularly regarding wFoMO. Younger participants may be more susceptible to wFoMO due to different socialization patterns, technological familiarity, or career stages; however, we did not find significant associations between age and wFoMO. Third, the indirect effects may have lacked significance because they are suppressor effects, as the direct effects from X → M are negative, while the direct effects from M → Y are generally positive. These interpretations remain speculative, and future research should further examine how age, employment status, and career phase may interact with wFoMO.

Next, we only included employee well-being in Study 3. Consequently, we were able to examine the effects of unmet autonomy needs via wFoMO, but not those corresponding to relatedness or competence. Future experimental studies should include well-being indicators across all needs, especially since past studies have revealed associations between belongingness and ill-being (Brown & Leite, 2023) and work-related loneliness and well-being (Becker et al., 2022).

Practical implications

Our study offers practical implications for remote work policies. First, our study highlights the consequences of poorly implemented remote work policies, which can amplify feelings of wFoMO

and reduce well-being. To prevent this, companies need to be aware that remote work may involve situations in which meeting work-related needs is more difficult. Organizations and team leaders/managers could develop corresponding strategies, trust, and good communication. However, past studies have also shown several benefits of remote work and that hybrid work settings are a preferred option for employees (Continental AG, 2023). Further, Study 3 indicated that 'back-to-the-office' policies may harm organizations, as involuntary office work is more damaging to well-being than remote work. This underscores the importance of autonomy in work settings, corresponding with Gajendran et al. (2024) as well as theoretical propositions regarding remote work and SDT (Gagné et al., 2022). Moreover, it aligns with the conservation of resources theory (COR; Hobfoll, 1989), which states that employees strive to maintain and protect their own resources. Having the flexibility to work remotely may depict such a resource, and being forced to work in the office may be experienced as a resource loss. In this context, we highlight two take-aways: (1) Organizations should be aware that work-related needs may be harder to fulfil in remote settings, and employees with unmet needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy may have higher levels of wFoMO. (2) It is important to prioritize autonomy and give employees a say in where and how they work, to the extent possible. Creating policies that facilitate choice may mitigate the adverse effects associated with employees being required to work in undesired ways or places. This implication may be of particular importance for human resources professionals, who aim to prevent employees from experiencing need deprivation.

Finally, since wFoMO represents a new challenge linked to need deprivation in remote work, managers should learn to recognize its signs and respond proactively, ensuring employees feel included and well-informed, regardless of their work location.

CONCLUSION

This article deepens our understanding of the complexities and implications of remote work by examining how unmet needs impact wFoMO and employee well-being. Study 1 identified associations between wFoMO and remote work, paving the way for further research. Study 2 and 3 revealed how unmet needs at work affect wFoMO and well-being. These findings are relevant to organizations worldwide as they adapt to remote and hybrid work. Our research provides a foundation for understanding remote work's challenges, contributing to both theory and practice.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Linda-Elisabeth Reimann: Conceptualization; methodology; writing – review and editing; writing – original draft; data curation; supervision; project administration; formal analysis. **Carmen Binnewies:** Writing – review and editing; supervision; methodology. **Lilly Kruse:** Conceptualization; methodology; writing – original draft; formal analysis. **Karolin Küskes:** Writing – original draft; conceptualization; methodology. **Helena Thorbrügge:** Conceptualization; writing – original draft; methodology; formal analysis. **Phillip Ozimek:** Writing – review and editing. **Sophie Loose:** Writing – review and editing.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

All authors report no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in OSF at https://osf.io/cvk68/?view_only=367d41ea130c4a4982e89307e1f35a8d.

ORCID

Linda-Elisabeth Reimann https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5500-8566

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