

Multi-Item Scale for Project:

European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) (English Version)

Question Text:

English version: Are you able to choose or change...

German version: Können Sie sich Folgendes aussuchen bzw. ändern?

Answer Categories:

Yes

No

Don't know

Refusal

Findings for Multi-Item Scale:

Online Probing:

Across all countries, self-employed respondents are more likely to answer that they can choose or change their order of tasks, methods, and also speed of their work. However, the majority of all respondents agree with these items, indicating positive decision latitude.

In question 18a, Item A and Item B were probed to get a better understanding of how respondents interpret both items and whether the interpretations differ between employees and self-employed.

Cognitive Interviews:

This question was asked in the cognitive online pretest to assess differences between employed and self-employed. It was decided that these differences and further related issues should be taken up in more depth in the face-to-face cognitive interviews.

As in the online pretest, most respondents answered positively to all three items, with only two respondents not choosing "yes" for each statement in Germany and three to four in Poland. In almost all cases, these were employed respondents.

Comprehension and differentiation of items

The understanding of the second item and the term "methods" was explored. The German translation into "Vorgehen" (literally "procedure") is rather similar to the translation of the first item "Reihenfolge" (order).

For both the German and Polish respondents, differences in comprehension don't arise from employment status as such (i.e. employed versus self-employed, or typical versus atypical employment situation), but from the individual work settings. Associations are

commonly related to temporal, organizational or procedural aspects, or referring to order.

Respondents gave definitions of the term "methods of work" with ease and give in-scope examples:

- "maintaining competence" (DE03)
- "determination of the daily routine and rhythm by/for yourself" (DE04)
- "creating a priority list and executing them according to importance" (DE05)

However, respondents often confound the dimensions in their explanations. This means that they demonstrate a correct understanding of the term methods, but usually add aspects that refer to the order of their tasks and/or their pace of work:

- "I can decide which steps are necessary. I can decide how these steps are carried out. And I can decide when these steps are carried out" (DE01)
- "Well, the job that I do in my company – most people even where I work don't know how to do that. So that gives me the possibility to choose how I work. I can say, this takes so and so long, because no one can check that" (DE06)

In sum, "methods of work" is clearly a related concept to order of tasks and also pace of work, with some respondents differentiating these aspects better than others.

Answer Options

Both in Poland and in Germany, one respondent refused to answer item B, saying that they couldn't decide. These respondents wanted to have an answer option "partially" or "half/half". These respondents explain why they would need an "in-between" category:

- "Sometimes it is imposed by employer, the predefined standard, conditions and I cannot change that, but sometimes I can decide on what I believe is better for the group and adjust to conditions we have" (PL02)
- "Sometimes it is imposed by employer, the predefined standard, conditions and I cannot change that, but sometimes I can decide on what I believe is better for the group and adjust to conditions we have" (PL02)

In Poland, nearly half the respondents spontaneously reacted to the questions saying it is hard to give a categorical, binary answer, as situations vary. Nine respondents in Poland (PL02, PL03, PL05, PL06, PL08, PL09, PL11, PL14) explicitly state that a scale should be used to give a differentiated answer.

- "A scale would better reflect reality" (PL12)

In Germany, ten of 16 respondents state that the answer category is very good, good, ok, or indicated that there was no category missing. Three respondents (DE03, DE11,

DE16) explicitly missed a third category "in parts". Another three respondents (DE02, DE05, DE14) would prefer to give open answers to this question.

In sum, most respondents choose "yes" as an answer category because they feel that this answer is more appropriate when they feel that they can "sometimes" or "often" influence their order or tasks, methods of work or pace. Giving "no" as an answer is only done when they have "absolutely no say" in this regard.

Other findings

One respondent continually refers to both his main paid job and his additional job while answering the question (DE14). This is an example of respondents forgetting to focus on the main paid job only. Another respondent (DE05) double-checks with the interviewer whether she should refer to her main paid job.

Recommendations for Multi-Item Scale:

Question: No changes recommended.

Answer categories: We recommend using a 5-scaled answer option, ranging from "always" to "more than half of the time", "about half of the time", "less than half of the time", "never". This way, it remains possible to differentiate between respondents whose work gives a high and low level of autonomy.

Cognitive Techniques:

Specific Probing. (OP) Paraphrasing, General/Elaborative Probing, Specific Probing. (CI)

All Items for Question(Question Text):

English version: Are you able to choose or change...

German version: Können Sie sich Folgendes aussuchen bzw. ändern?

-> Tested Items:

Item Text:

A. your order of tasks

Recommendations:

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Findings:

When asked to explain why they selected their answers to this item, respondents argue along several lines.

Those who state that they are able to choose or change their order of tasks predominantly argue that their jobs involve a certain level of autonomy (about 70% of the cases in each country). These respondents think about their jobs in general when answering this item and not so much about specific tasks and activities. Therefore, the actual jobs of these respondents range from chambermaid (R139PL) to self-employed film maker (R192UK):

- "I work as a chambermaid. So it is up to me whether I first clean the room, the bathroom, or the patio." (R139PL)
- "I make films. If I am in the process of an edit and am asked to shoot something else, I'll usually prioritise the shoot and delay the edit." (R192UK)
- "I have several tasks to do and it is up to me to decide which to complete first. The order is not relevant, it is only important to get things done." (R56DE)

This reasoning is provided equally often by employees and the self-employed.

Another line of reasoning among those who answer "yes" to Item A is that task order depends on the urgency or priority of a given task. This reasoning occurs in about 5% of the cases in each country and is mostly given by self-employed respondents:

- "Urgent matters are dealt with first." (R406DE)
- "I give priority to what needs completing the fastest." (R184UK)
- "Depends on the urgency." (R1206PL)

Respondents who say they are not able to choose or change their order of tasks mostly argue that their work requires them to complete tasks according to a specific schedule (about 12% to 18% of the cases in each country):

- "I have to follow a duty roster." (R83DE)
- "We have production plans to follow." (R20UK)
- "I work at an assembly line. So, of course, it is not possible to change the order of tasks. For example, when I have to glue boxes together, I cannot close the lids first and glue the inside together afterwards." (R104PL)

Surprisingly, this explanation is provided not only by employees, but also by self-employed respondents (DE: 2 respondents, UK: 4 respondents, PL: 9 respondents). It seems that these respondents do not interpret the item to refer to the general level of autonomy involved in their job but to a rather specific task or specific working conditions:

- "I have to design a working plan beforehand and then stick to it when carrying it out." (R352DE)
- "You can't change anything or you wouldn't sell." (R196UK)
- "The order is strictly determined by law and by the technical requirements." (R98PL; Respondent installs fiber-optic networks)
- "In farming, you can't start from back to front." (R202PL)

Another surprising finding is that four respondents (DE: 2, UK: 2), who work as (pre-school) teachers, say they are not able to change their order of tasks but that the order is dictated by the curricula or pupils:

- "I work with children. They require a fixed schedule which gives them a feeling of security." (R68DE)
- "The curriculum and the child dictate the order." (R247DE)
- "Bound by the curriculum." (R24UK)
- "The day depends on the classroom timetable – no changing it around." (R37UK)

Finally, a few respondents in each country (DE: 4, UK: 3, PL: 1) argue that the order of their tasks depends on their clients. This explanation is given by both employees and the self-employed:

- "If a client needs some help, then everything else has to wait. The client always comes first." (R75DE; employee)
- "It is dictated by the clients." (R37UK; self-employed)

It is important to note that two of these eight respondents answer "yes" to Item A, while the other six respondents answered "no". Hence, when interpreting this item, the focus of the first two respondents is on whether their order of tasks changes from time to time, while the focus of the latter six respondents is on whether they are able to choose or change the order "as they please".

Question Topic:

Job and career/ Job situation & professional activity

Construct:

Autonomy

Item Text:

B. your methods of work

Recommendations:

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Findings:

Interestingly, considerably more German respondents say they are able to choose or change their methods of work (about 90%) than UK and Polish respondents (about 70% respectively). A closer look at the response distributions reveals that this difference is mostly due to the fact that employees in Germany are considerably more likely to answer "yes" to this item (83%) than employees in the UK (53%) and Poland (57%). It seems that the term "methods of work" is interpreted somewhat differently by respondents in Germany than by respondents in the other two countries. Given that the understanding of this term was not probed directly in this study, this issue should ideally be addressed further in the upcoming face-to-face cognitive pretest.

Similar to Item A, those who state that they are able to choose or change their methods of work mostly argue that their jobs involve a certain level of autonomy (about 90% of the cases in each country). Again, these respondents think about their jobs in general when answering Item B and not so much about specific tasks and activities:

- "I am free to decide how I do things." (R105DE)
- "I can work how I like as I am the owner of the company." (R44PL)
- "Similar to previous answer, if I find a quicker/more efficient way of doing a task I will do this. Not restricted." (R8UK)

This reasoning is provided slightly more often by self-employed respondents than by employees.

Again, similar to Item A, of those who answer "yes" to Item B, a few self-employed respondents argue that their method of work depends on the urgency or priority of a given job. However, this reasoning is only provided by eight respondents in total (DE: 6, UK: 1, PL: 1).

The explanations of those who answer "no" to Item B are also very similar to the ones

already documented for Item A. Most respondents argue that they have to follow specific procedures or guidelines (about 65% of the cases in each country):

- "There are set processes." (R139DE)
- "We have to follow strict guidelines." (R88UK)
- "The procedures are clearly defined and the system parameterized." (R72PL)

Surprisingly, this explanation is again provided not only by employees, but also by self-employed respondents (DE: 1, UK: 6, PL: 7). It seems that these respondents do not interpret the item to refer to the general level of autonomy involved in their job but to a rather specific task or specific working conditions:

- "I could not change the way I translate documents." (R13UK)
- "When we grow flowers, we have to stick to a specific pattern. Fertilizer, antifungal agents, it is important that nothing is overlooked." (R98PL)

Finally, four respondents (DE: 2, PL: 2) argue that their method of work depends on their clients. This explanation is given by both employees and self-employed:

- "The methods are usually determined by the clients." (R272DE; employee)
- "The client decides how a task is done." (R268PL; self-employed)

However, in contrast to Item A, all of these four respondents say they are not able to choose or change their methods of work.

Question Topic:

Job and career/ Job situation & professional activity

Construct:

Autonomy

-> Not Tested Items:

Item Text:

C. your speed or rate of work

Question Topic:

Job and career/ Job situation & professional activity

Construct:

Autonomy