

Question in Project:

Pretesting of special module on ICT at work, working conditions & learning digital skills
(English Version)

Question Topic:

Digitalization/ Use of digital systems

Construct:

Effect of ICT usage at work on work-life-balance

General Information:

Note: The item was tested both in English and German.

Question Text:

English version: In the last 12 months, did the usage of computers, laptops, smartphones, or other computerised equipment have a positive or a negative effect on your work-life balance, if any?

German version: Hatte die Nutzung von Computern, Laptops, Smartphones und anderer computergesteuerter Ausstattung während der letzten 12 Monate einen positiven oder einen negativen Effekt auf Ihre Work-Life-Balance, wenn überhaupt?

Answer Categories:

English version:

A positive effect

A negative effect

No relevant change

German version:

Positiver Effekt

Negativer Effekt

Keine relevante Veränderung

Cognitive Techniques:

General Probing.

Findings for Question:

Question 11 asked respondents whether the usage of computers, laptops, smartphones, or other computerised equipment had a positive or a negative effect on their work-life balance in the last 12 months. Respondents could choose between the answer categories "A positive effect," "A negative effect," and "No relevant change." All categories were exclusive categories and, therefore, percentages add up to 100 percent. The majority of German respondents (63.79 percent) and of British respondents (55.74 percent) stated that there had been no relevant changes to their work-life balance due to the usage of computers, laptops, smartphones or other computerized equipment in the last 12 months. More English-speaking respondents (40.98 percent) than German-speaking respondents (29.31 percent) answer that the usage of computers and similar devices has had a positive effect on their worklife balance. In contrast, 4 Germans (6.90 percent) and 2 Britons (3.28 percent) report that there had been a negative effect.

Only respondents that selected the response "Yes" at question 3 received question 11. As a consequence, 26 respondents (14 English speaking respondents and 12 German speaking respondents) did not receive this question due to the filter in question 3. Depending on their answer selection at question 11, respondents either received Probe 12, Probe 13, or no probe at all for this question. Respondents who selected the answer category "A positive effect" were asked Probe 12 (25 British respondents and 17 German respondents) whereas respondents who chose the answer category "A negative effect" (2 British respondents, 4 German respondents) received Probe 13. If a respondent opted for the answer category "No relevant change," the respondent was not probed further at this question.

The intention of Probe 12 was to assess what was perceived as a **positive** change by respondents is included in the scope of the answer options of questions 10 and 11. Therefore, Probe 12 asked the respondents to describe the most important positive changes that they have experienced thanks to the usage of computers or similar devices. As multiple coding was employed, numbers do not add up to 100 percent. The respondents who felt that there had been a positive effect on their work-life balance listed a number of improvements in their job characteristics. Some claimed that due to the usage of computers and similar devices, they were able to complete their work faster (British respondents: 44.00 percent of, German respondents: 41.18 percent). Here are some responses that fell in this category:

- "Everything is done somewhat more quickly and easily when many things are networked and you can draw on saved resources." (German respondent, ID 54)

- "[There is] less time spent on repetitive tasks which are now automated by the computer software." (British respondent, ID 47)
- "With the new systems in operation we have had to do less manual work [...] It made us able to work faster in finding information and storing." (British respondent, ID 101)
- "The use of computers enables me to get my work done quicker and helps me to improve the accuracy of my work." (British respondent, ID 152)

Respondents also remarked that their tasks became easier (British respondents: 8.00 percent of, German respondents: 23.53 percent). For example, respondent 339 (German) pointed out that the usage of computers led to a "*simplification of work processes and resulting time-saving*." Two respondents added that their work became more effectively (1 British and 1 German respondent). Similarly, some respondents pointed out that they were now more productive (2 British respondents) or more accurate at work (1 British respondents). Other respondents listed positive changes such as less manual work, less paper work, or a reduced number of work steps (British respondents: 16.00 percent of, German respondents: 17.65 percent). Respectively, one German and one British respondent stated that their time-management at work had become more efficient. Three English-speaking respondents now enjoyed their work more, while one German respondent mentioned that he felt more comfortable at work nowadays. Some respondents listed the implementation of networking solutions (British respondent: 4.00 percent of, German respondents: 23.53 percent) and gaining skills, knowledge (2 British respondents) or clients as positive changes (1 British respondent, 1 German respondents). Three responses were unusable.

What is remarkable is that very few of these respondents (4 out of 42) also stated explicitly, how these changes in their work life impacted their work-life balance. However, we do not believe that this is a problem because it is reasonable to assume that changes like the ones portrayed here might lead to a better work-life balance.

Similar to Probe 12, the intention of Probe 13 was to check whether what was perceived as a negative change by respondents is included in the scope of the answer options of questions 10 and 11. Probe 13 encouraged the respondents to describe the most important negative changes that they have experienced thanks to the usage of computers or similar devices.

Due to the answer selection at question 11, only two British respondents and four German respondents received this probe. Two of the German respondents had issues with their constant accessibility due to the usage of computers or similar devices. For example respondent 51 remarked that "*with electronic devices, your employer can reach you almost around the clock*." In a similar vein, respondent 340 pointed out that he has "*become accustomed to checking my business mailbox in bed and again in the morning*." One respondent felt that he was sitting at the device too much and there was too little

personal communication among colleagues. One German respondent complained about the increased complexity of tasks: *"I have the feeling that work assignments have become more complicated and more time-consuming due to increasing digitalization."*

Further negative changes that the respondents named were the distraction due to the presence of social media platforms and inferior time-management. For example, respondent 330 (British) noted that *"there is anxiety about never getting enough done, I spend a lot more time on my computer than I do actually achieving things. It would be better to turn it off at 5pm and on the weekends."* There was one unusable response.

For a more detailed breakdown of the respondents' answers please refer to the tables in the attached PDF document.

Recommendations:

Question: The probe results potentially indicated that respondents do not answer the question with regard to their work-life balance. We would recommend underlining the term 'work-life balance' in the question to emphasize the intention of the question:

"In the last 12 months, did the usage of computers, laptops, smartphones, or other computerised equipment have a positive or a negative effect on your work-life balance, if any?"

"Hatte die Nutzung von Computern, Laptops, Smartphones und anderer computergesteuerter Ausstattung während der letzten 12 Monate einen positiven oder einen negativen Effekt auf Ihre Work-Life-Balance oder gab es keine Veränderung?"

Answer categories: No changes recommended.