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Remote working and loneliness
EURAM 2022
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Remote work (telecommuting)

‣ Remote work refers to the work done in remote working station rather than in the office/workplace.

   ‣ Usually remote work is done at home.

‣ Hybrid work combines remote and "normal" onsite work

   ‣ Certain amount of work is done remotely

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Risks of remote work

‣ Performance?

‣ Elon Musk:

‣ Boris Johnson:

  ‣ Personal experience: drinking coffee and eating cheese while remote working takes too much time from work.

‣ However, studies and experiences from COVID-19 era have shown that performance remains good in remote work.

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The real risk of remote work

▸ The social relationships at work are threatened

    ▸ Reflects on the well-being of employees

    ▸ Feeling of belonging and communality crumble

    ▸ Reduced commitment

    ▸ Problems in information flow

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Social practices and interaction in remote work

‣ The social practices and habits at work have been usually formed in the context of onsite work.

  ‣ Need to reinvent social practices to take account remote and hybrid work.

‣ Social practices in remote/hybrid work compared to "normal" onsite work:

  ‣ There might be less opportunities for social interaction

  ‣ Communication is different

    ‣ Concentrates more on work

    ‣ Formal

    ‣ Superficial

    ‣ Risk for misinterpretations is bigger

  ‣ Risk for loneliness at work

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Data collection

▸ Quantitative data has been collected in three waves from a big Finnish corporation in technology industry.

  ▸ T1 spring 2020, T2 autumn 2020, T3 spring 2021

  ▸ A total of 496 employees responded in all three time points.

  ▸ Fourth wave is coming very soon

  ▸ We have collected also some qualitative data

▸ Loneliness at work was assessed with 6 items from the scale of Ozcelik & Barsade (2018) who adopted the scale from UCLA.

	T1	T2	T3
N	1207	1017	768
Amount of remote work (0-60 %)	24 %	7 %	6 %
Amount of remote work (61-80 %)	10 %	7 %	8 %
Amount of remote work (81-99 %)	15 %	20 %	25 %
Amount of remote work (100 %)	**51 %**	**66 %**	**61 %**
Loneliness at work (mean, sd)	1.92 (0.74)	2.03 (0.79)	2.03 (0.82)

Distribution of loneliness at work in different samples
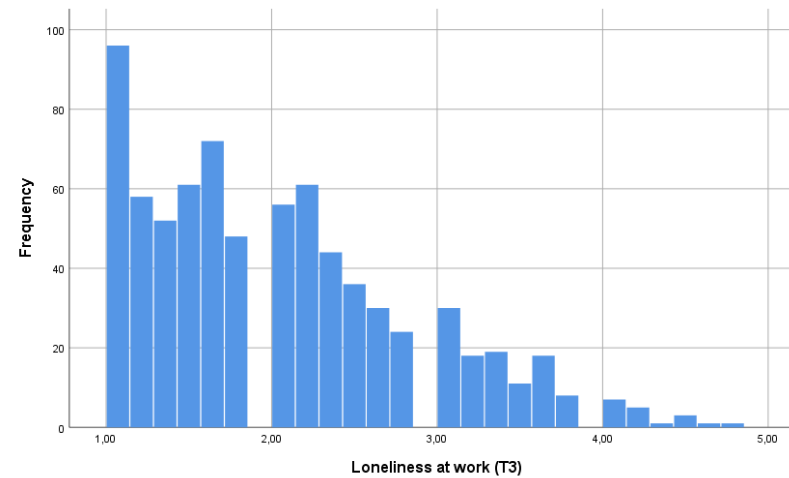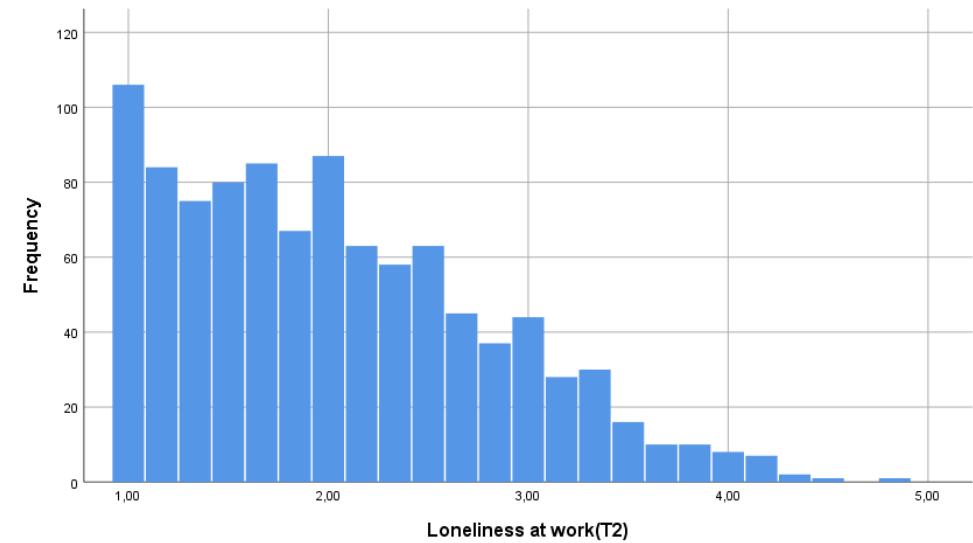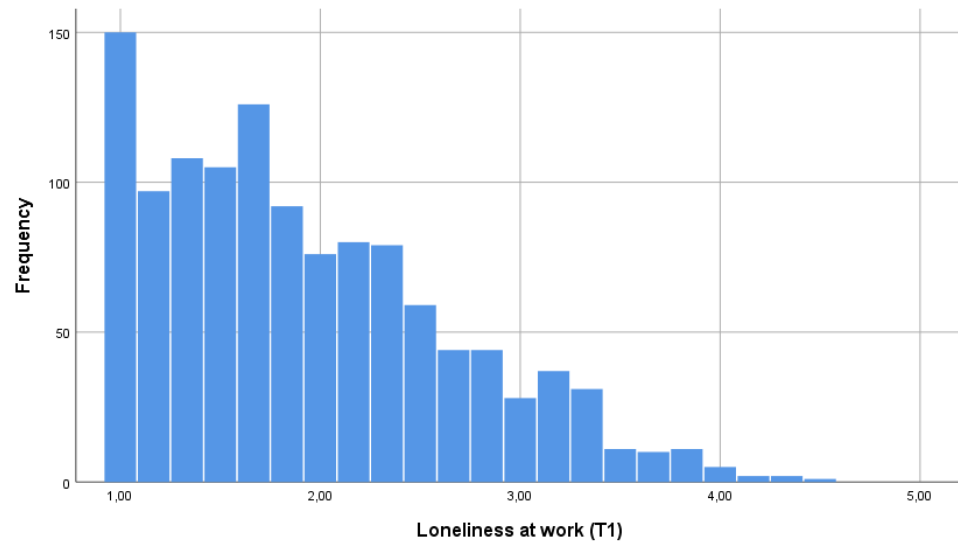
Development profiles of loneliness at work during remote work period

▸ Latent profile analysis identified three developmental profiles.

▸ First profile (53%): relatively stable low level of loneliness at work.

▸ The second profile (33%): mediocre level of loneliness at work with a small increase in time.

▸ The third profile (13%): a high level of loneliness at work, which further increased over time particularly between T1 and T2.
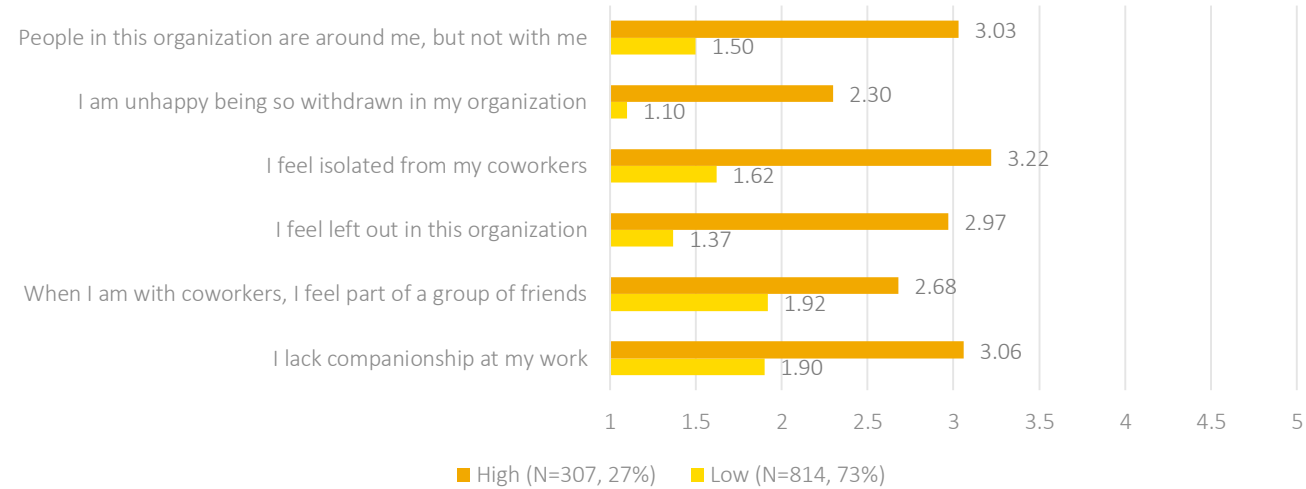
Loneliness at work development profiles

Group 1 (N=245)   Group 2 (N=62)   Group 3 (N=153)
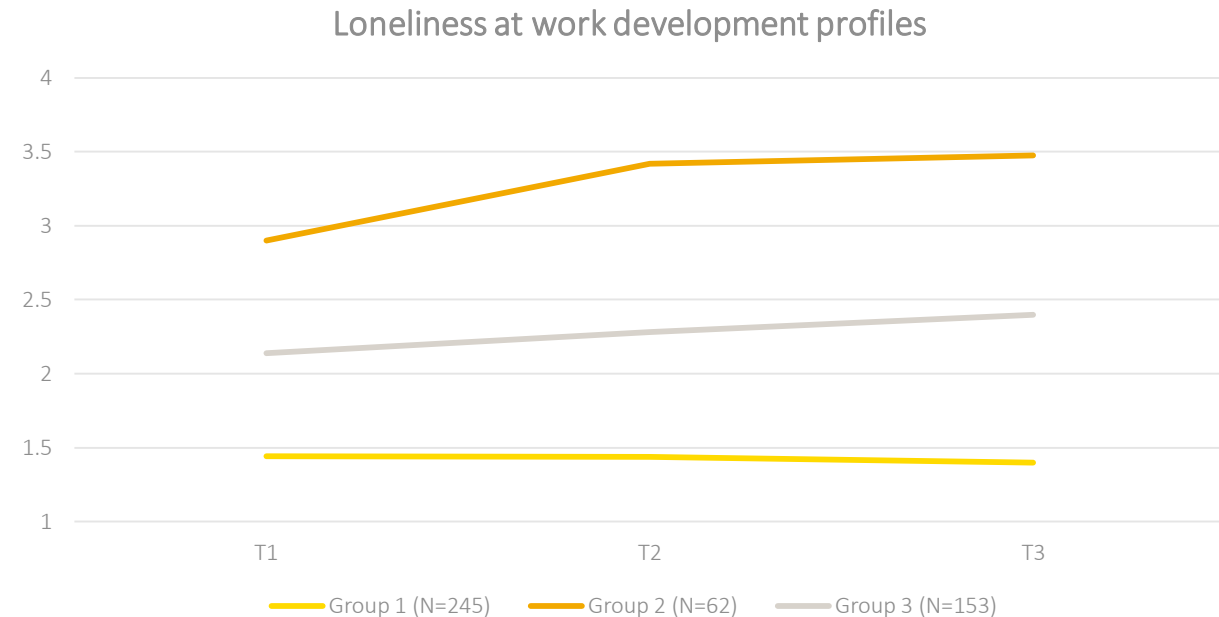
▸ Analyze of group/profile predictors is on the way.
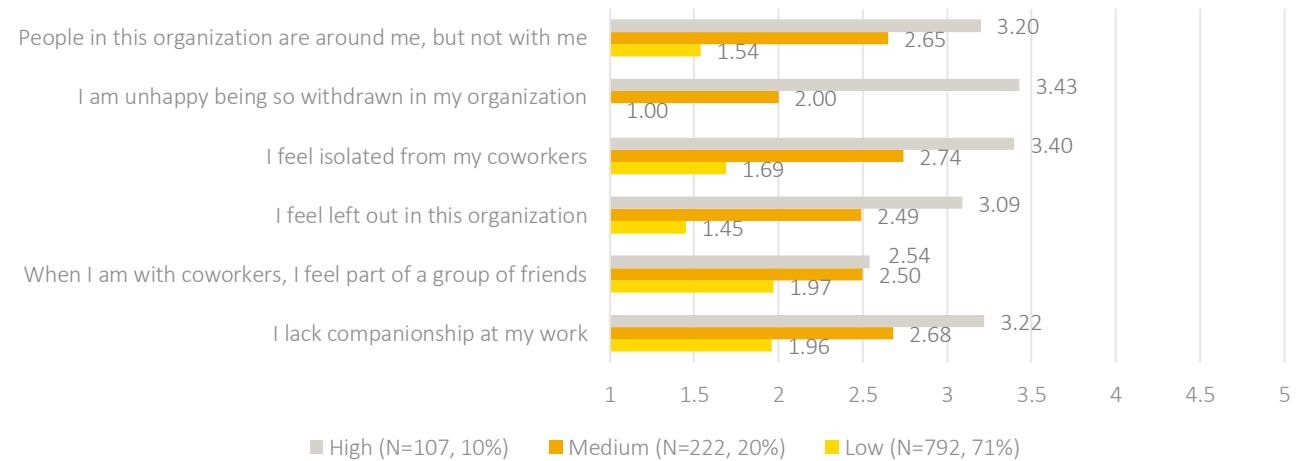
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How many suffer from high work loneliness?

▸ Profile analysis of work loneliness items with T1 data suggests 2 or 3 groups.

▸ Thus, 10 % or 27 % belong to a high loneliness at work group.

Loneliness at work profiles (2 groups)

Item	High (N=307, 27%)	Low (N=814, 73%)
People in this organization are around me, but not with me	3.03	1.50
I am unhappy being so withdrawn in my organization	2.30	1.10
I feel isolated from my coworkers	3.22	1.62
I feel left out in this organization	2.97	1.37
When I am with coworkers, I feel part of a group of friends	2.68	1.92
I lack companionship at my work	3.06	1.90

■ High (N=307, 27%)   ■ Low (N=814, 73%)

Loneliness at work profiles (3 groups)

Item	High (N=107, 10%)	Medium (N=222, 20%)	Low (N=792, 71%)
People in this organization are around me, but not with me	3.20	2.65	1.54
I am unhappy being so withdrawn in my organization	3.43	2.00	1.00
I feel isolated from my coworkers	3.40	2.74	1.69
I feel left out in this organization	3.09	2.49	1.45
When I am with coworkers, I feel part of a group of friends	2.54	2.50	1.97
I lack companionship at my work	3.22	2.68	1.96

■ High (N=107, 10%)   ■ Medium (N=222, 20%)   ■ Low (N=792, 71%)

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The amount of remote work and loneliness at work

Loneliness at work at the different levels in the amount of remote work

	T1	T2	T3 (**)
Amount of remote work (0-60 %)	1.89 (N=282)	1.87 (N=67)	1.70 (N=45)
Amount of remote work (61-80 %)	1.97	2.07	1.99
Amount of remote work (81-99 %)	1.96	2.08	2.02
Amount of remote work (100 %)	1.93	2.04	2.07
TOTAL	1.93	2.04	2.03

Analysis would benefit from a data having more employees with low amount of remote work.

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Preferring remote or onsite work and loneliness

THOUGHTS CHANGED REGARDING REMOTE WORK

Legend: To positive direction, To negative direction, No change

Loneliness (y-axis)

T1: 1.81, 2.39, 2.01
T2: 1.96, 2.44, 1.97
T3: 1.91, 2.52, 1.95
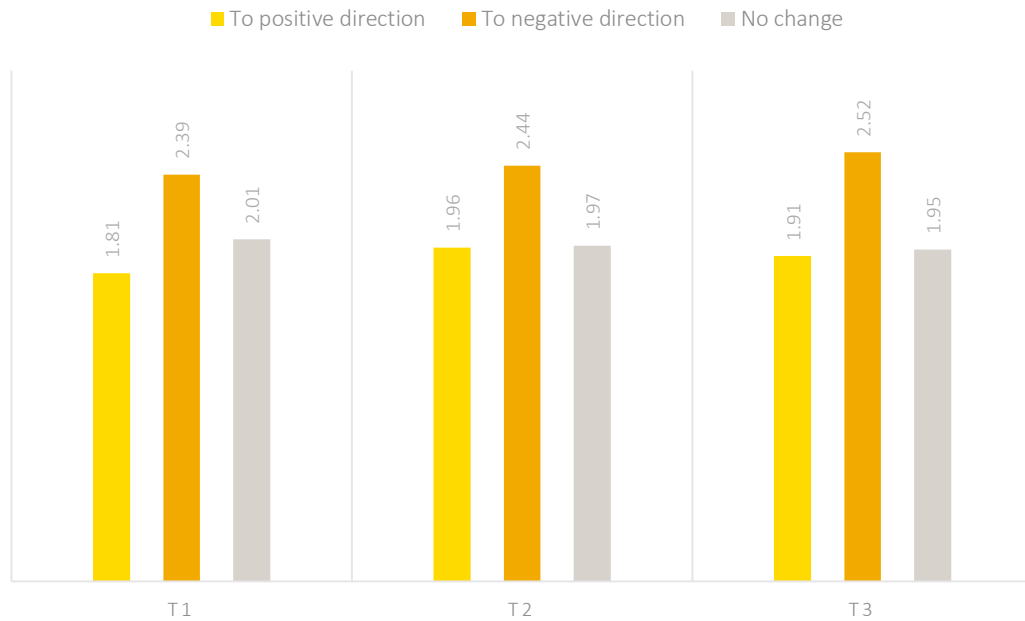
Loneliness according to preference either for onsite or remote

	Equally good	Remote	Office
Bigger meeting	1.78	1.84	1.96
Meeting for couple of people	1.77	1.76	2.05
Routine tasks	1.91	1.82	2.05
Brainstorming / planning as a group	1.67	1.64	1.94
Independent brainstorming / planning	1.92	1.85	2.13
A task that requires concentration	1.93	1.86	2.07

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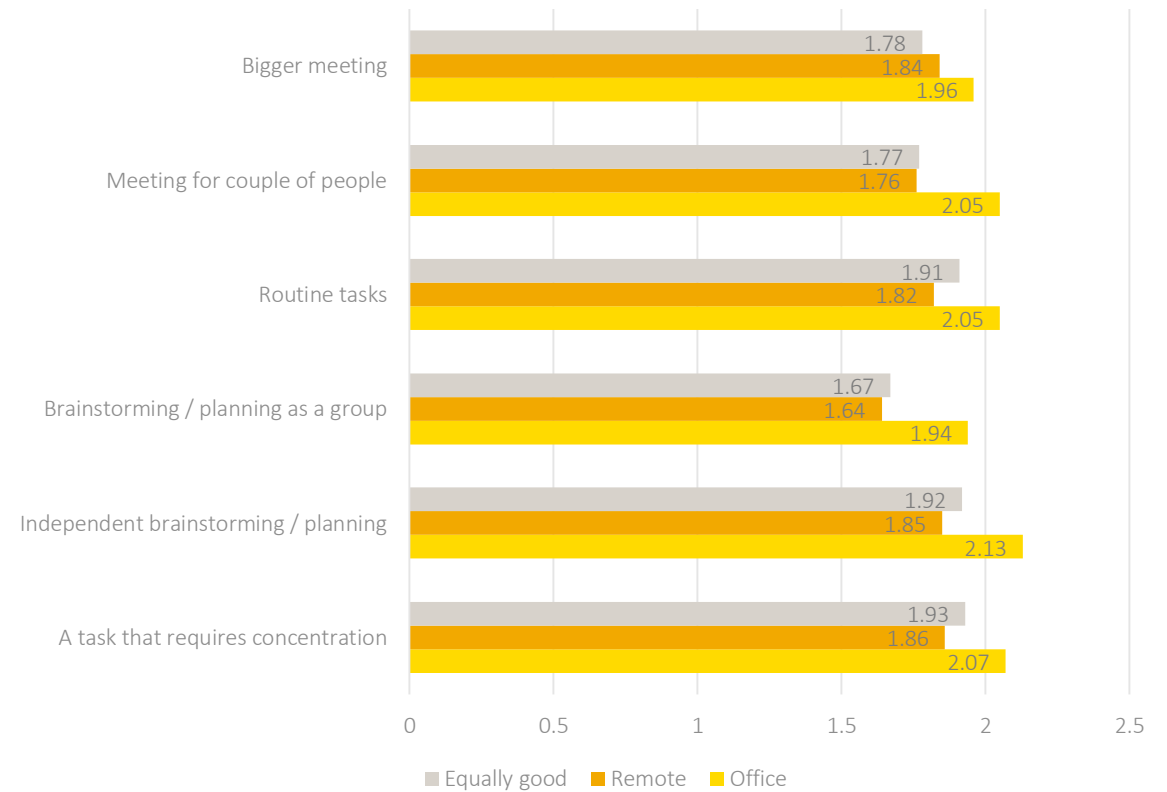
Predictors of loneliness during remote work

- Risk factors
  - Amount of remote work
  - Time pressure
    - Remote social interaction usually needs organizing and effort
  - Job insecurity

- Protecting factors
  - Social relationships at work made before remote work
  - Autonomy/control
    - Possibility to organize own work and make time for social relations
  - High quality leader-member exchange (LMX)
  - Social support
    - Specially colleagues, but also supervisors
  - Self-leadership skills
  - Organizational practices concerning remote and hybrid work
  - Regular virtual meetings
  - Using instant messaging and video-conference tools
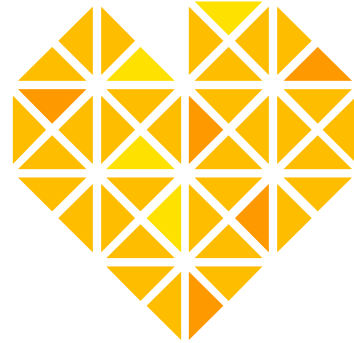   - Unofficial meetings with camera on

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Loneliness at work during remote work is connected with negative outcomes

‣ More psychosomatic symptoms

‣ Stress

‣ Burnout

‣ Worst balance between home and work

‣ Less satisfied with doing remote work

‣ Lower work engagement

‣ Lower performance and organizational citizenship behavior

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How to reduce loneliness in remote work?

▸ Change of daily social practices
▸ Social programs
  ▸ Mentoring, information bank regarding good social habits and practices
▸ More opportunities to meet (virtually)
  ▸ Working together
  ▸ Official meetings
    ▸ Meeting open before or after for free discussion
  ▸ Unofficial meetings
    ▸ Virtual lounge (always open)
    ▸ Coffee breaks at certain time
      ▸ Question/topic of a day
▸ Communication
  ▸ Being polite, noticing everyone, asking how you are doing
  ▸ Unofficial tone in communication
  ▸ Have to be more aware *how* to communicate
  ▸ Emojis might reduce the risk of misinterpreting messages

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