

Students' Attitudes About Virtual Work Post-Pandemic: How Confidence Online and Virtual Communication Skills Drive Intentions for Future Remote Work

Emily Findlay¹ and Sara Driskell^{2,*}

¹ Undergraduate Student, Department of Psychological Sciences, Auburn University

² Lecturer, Department of Psychological Sciences, Auburn University

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a significant portion of the population has experience with online work. While younger generations have spent extended portions of their lives interacting with technology and are known as digital natives, missed socially significant milestones and time spent away from friends and loved ones could also contribute towards negative attitudes about the remote workplace.

The purpose of this study is to examine how students, who will enter the workforce in a few short years, perceive remote work. This work is important so that we can inform policies for re-integrating people into workspaces post-pandemic and improve how organizations and academic institutions utilize remote work moving forward. This study investigates students' self-efficacy (or confidence) in using online tools, their perceived online communication skills, their motivation for completing remote coursework, how much they are satisfied with remote work, and how much they value remote work.

695 Undergraduate students (74.5% women, 82.7% white American) were surveyed through the Auburn University Psychology Department's participant pool. Participants were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed with statements on a 1-5 Likert scale (5 being strongly agree). Sample items from the survey include "Remote work experiences (ex: internships) develop my career just as much as in-person work experiences," to measure students' value of remote work and "I can communicate effectively in one-on-one Zoom or video conferences," to measure students' self-rated online communication skills.

Results provided interesting insights into students' online self-efficacy and virtual communication abilities. Students felt positive about their online self-efficacy ($M=4.29$, $SD=.73$), as seen in Figure 1, but they struggled with online communication and participation using Zoom ($M=2.86$, $SD=.55$), even after experience during the pandemic. Many students reported being on the receiving end of virtual communications (e.g., listening passively during an online lecture) but rarely presented on Zoom themselves ($M=1.85$, $SD=.98$). Additionally, students rated themselves higher for their abilities in email communication but not as highly as they could have for such a common form of communication ($M=3.56$, $SD=.82$).

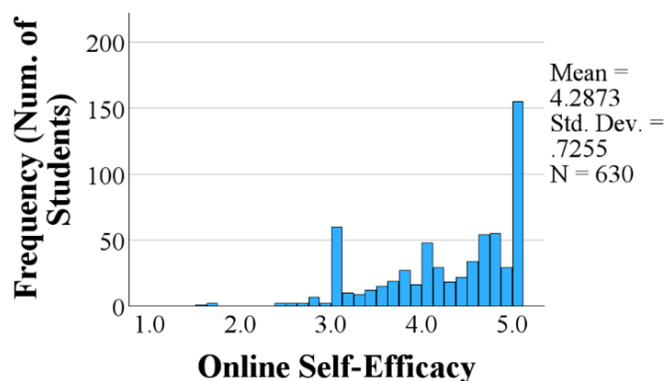


Fig. 1. Students' ratings of their online self-efficacy

Students had lower ratings for remote work satisfaction ($M=2.94$, $SD=.64$) and remote work value ($M=2.88$, $SD=.71$) but higher ratings for remote work motivation ($M=3.34$, $SD=.91$). Online self-efficacy correlated positively with students' remote work satisfaction ($r=.227$ $p<.001$), students' remote work value ($r=.227$ $p<.001$), and remote work motivation ($r=.372$ $p<.001$). Online self-efficacy also positively correlated with stu-

* Corresponding author: driskell@auburn.edu

dents' Zoom and email communication skills ($r=.158$, $p<.001$ and $r=.394$, $p<.001$, respectively). Furthermore, both Zoom and email communication skills correlated positively with students' Auburn University Journal of Undergraduate Scholarship remote work satisfaction ($r=.234$, $p<.001$ and $r=.131$, $p<.001$, respectively), remote work value ($r=.209$, $p<.001$ and $r=.126$, $p<.001$, respectively), and remote work motivation ($r=.334$, $p<.001$ and $r=.248$, $p<.001$, respectively). Remote work value ($r=.557$, $p<.001$) also correlated positively with students' remote work motivation, as seen in Figure 2.

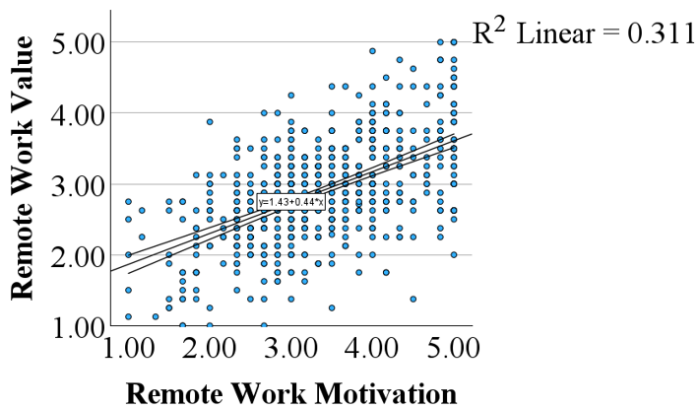


Fig. 2. The correlation between students' ratings of their motivation toward remote work and how much they value remote work.

Serial mediation analyses indicate that increased self-efficacy is linked to higher virtual communication skills, which in turn increases motivation for remote work and then predicts students' satisfaction for remote work, as seen in Figure 3 ($b=.01$, $t=3.51$, 95% CI [0.0074, 0.02333]), and students' value of remote work, as seen in Figure 4 ($b=.02$, $t=3.70$, 95% CI [0.0126, 0.0385]). Because students' self-efficacy ratings were already high, this suggests that increasing students' online communication skills could improve their online motivation, which is linked to higher satisfaction and valuing of remote work.

Future research with Auburn students should develop interventions to improve comfort in online communication and examine their impact on students' attitudes towards and valuing of remote work. However, we may need to examine these patterns at other universities to better understand how universal these findings are and how to best intervene with other populations.

This research shows that even digital natives experience challenges in online work. Organizations and academic institutions can utilize this research to improve how remote work is implemented moving forward.

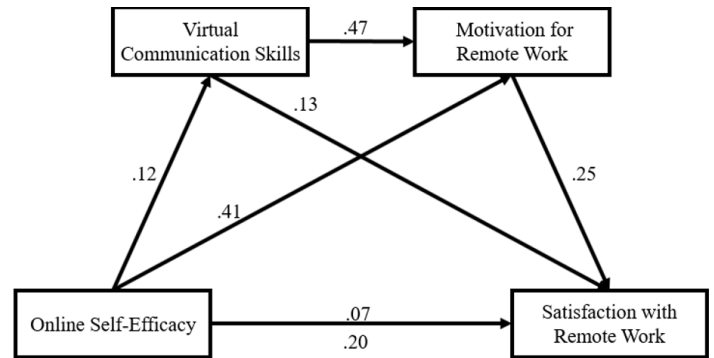


Fig. 3. The serial mediation analyses for online self-efficacy, virtual communication skills, motivation for remote work, and students' satisfaction for remote work.

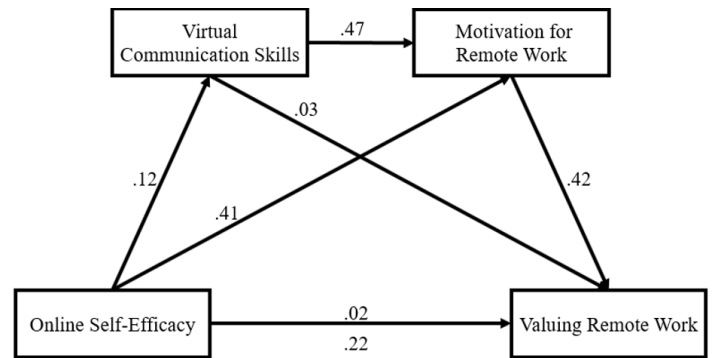


Fig. 4. The serial mediation analyses for online self-efficacy, virtual communication skills, motivation for remote work, and students' valuing of remote work.

Statement of Research Advisor

Emily conducted a scoping correlational study to examine undergraduate students' perceptions of virtual work and what factors contribute to these views. Learning more about these factors can help more young people thrive in online work environments. It can also be used by businesses and colleges and universities to better help their students prepare for the future and to improve their online work skills through interventions.
- Sara Driskell, Department of Psychological Sciences, College of Liberal Arts

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Authors Biography



Emily Findlay is a senior-year student pursuing a B.A. degree in Psychology at Auburn University. She is in Auburn’s I/O Psychology Advanced Bachelors-Master’s Program and will return Fall 2024 to complete her M.A. in I/O Psychology. Her research interests include remote work and organizational culture.

Dr. Sara Driskell received her B.A. in Psychology and Studies of Women and Gender from the University of Virginia in 2005. She received her Ph. D. in Social Psychology from Indiana University, Bloomington in 2018, after which she joined Auburn University’s Department of Psychological Sciences. Dr. Driskell’s research involves looking at intergroup processes in applied social psychology, including how group members perceive and interact with each other and the consequences of group membership in a variety of modern contexts, including the classroom, the workplace, and the courtroom.