Press Release
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Study: How the Home Office Trend is Leading People to Work While Ill

Stayed at home – but can’t stop working despite being ill? Why do employees choose to do so? And what can employers do to stop them? A new study conducted by researchers from Kühne Logistics University (KLU) and WHU – Otto Beisheim School of Management took a closer look at the phenomenon of “workahomeism and offers clear recommendations. As it shows, employees’ feelings of guilt play a major role.

In the course of three studies, ca. 650 participants were surveyed and their responses concerning their decision in the case of a theoretical or actual illness were analyzed. The good news: since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, survey results indicate that employees increasingly feel guilty for going to work despite being ill. The bad news: Employees feel much less guilty for working from home despite being ill.

Twofold feelings of guilt

The findings show that the decision to work is independent of how serious the illness is. When it comes to the reasons for this behavior, according to Prisca Brosi, a Professor of Human Resource Management at KLU: “Many employees feel guilty towards the rest of their team if they ‘only’ rest at home and aren’t available to help. That’s why some of them opt to still do at least some work.” Yet these employees often overlook the consequences of their choice, as Fabiola H. Gerpott, a Professor of Leadership at WHU, adds: “When I choose to keep working instead of getting some rest, I can also feel guilt towards myself. On the one hand, these employees are often less productive due to their illness; on the other, they can sense that their choice is harmful to their own health.”

Companies should encourage reflection

What can companies do to avoid the negative impacts of sick employees working from home? As the two experts underscore, they absolutely have to avoid giving the impression that their employees are expected to be reachable even when they’re sick. As Prof. Brosi explains, “Companies should address this in advance, and make it clear that this type of behavior harms employees’ own health and doesn’t allow them to work productively. It’s not enough to request that employees stay home when they’re ill; they should also be encouraged to reflect on the negative consequences of nevertheless choosing to work.”

Further information:
- Downloadable photo material: Prof. Prisca Brosi, Prof. Fabiola H. Gerpott, image material KLU

About KLU
Kühne Logistics University – Wissenschaftliche Hochschule für Logistik und Unternehmensführung (KLU) – is a private university located in Hamburg’s HafenCity. The independent, state-certified university’s major research areas are Sustainability, Digital Transformation and Value Creation in the fields of Transport, Global Logistics, and Supply Chain Management.

KLU is one of very few private universities in Germany entitled to confer their own PhDs. The 2021 ranking of the Wirtschaftswoche identifies KLU as one of the strongest research universities in the field of Business Administration in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. Comparing the research output per professor among all participating universities, KLU ranked 4th in Germany and 8th in the DACH region. In the latest CHE university ranking, KLU obtained the highest marks for all major criteria.

With one BSc and three MSc degree programs, a structured doctoral program, and a part-time Executive MBA, KLU offers its 400 full-time students a high level of specialization and excellent learning conditions. KLU has an international team of 27 professors who teach in English. In open, tailor-made management seminar series, industry specialists and managers alike benefit from the application of academic findings to practical issues.

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WHU – Otto Beisheim School of Management:
WHU - Otto Beisheim School of Management is an internationally oriented, privately financed business school with university status, located in Vallendar and Düsseldorf. At WHU, more than 50 faculty members research and teach in the fields of management, finance and accounting, economics, entrepreneurship and innovation, marketing and sales, and supply chain management. WHU’s high level of research competence is the result of a focus on three fundamental research principles: quality, internationality, and relevance for teaching and practice.

WHU’s strategy is based on four core values: excellence, entrepreneurship, strong cohesion, and a cosmopolitan culture. An atmosphere characterized by openness, curiosity, diversity, and equal opportunities is of utmost importance to WHU.

Further information is available at www.whu.edu