

Home v Work = Dr Jekyll v Mr Hyde: Exploring the context dependency of pro-environmental behaviour

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Behaviour change for environmental sustainability is challenging. Getting people to break energy-consuming habits and sustain energy-conscious alternatives over time, without sufferance from ‘fallback’ or behavioural rebound is, at present, an unresolved problem. One explanation could be that current interventions are too narrowly focused; they target changing people’s behaviour in one isolated context without consideration of whether these changes will transfer to a different context.

The few studies that have examined behaviour across contexts found there is systematic heterogeneity; in other words, people are not consistent. In particular, research shows that people’s behavioural patterns are more pro-environmental in a home context compared to when on holiday (Dolnicar & Grun, 2009), and more specifically, they recycle more at home than when at work (McDonald, 2011). In essence, individuals have a Dr Jekyll v Mr Hyde personality when behaving pro-environmentally.

This research explored the home v work divide further by measuring participants’ performance of a range of pro-environmental behaviours across home and work contexts. It also explored the barriers and facilitators for saving energy at home and work. The data were self-reported and collected using an online questionnaire. Participants (n=58) reported how frequently they perform 7 identical pro-environmental behaviours in home and work contexts. Additionally, they also ranked 15 factors (e.g., my sense of social responsibility) on how much they influenced their efforts to save energy at home and work.

The results show that, in line with previous research, individuals’ patterns of behaviour are overall more environmentally

friendly at home compared to at work ($M = 19.34$, $SD = 4.61$ v $M = 14.94$, $SD = 5.97$, $t(114) = 4.43$, $p < .01$). In particular, participants reported to perform 57% of the pro-environmental behaviours more frequently at home compared to at work. The facilitators for saving energy also differed according to context. For example, participants reported that having good role models, such as management and local authorities/Government leading by example, was more important for saving energy at work compared to at home (*Mann Whitney U* $Z = 3.63$, $p < .001$).

These results show that pro-environmental behaviour patterns differ systematically according to context, and that in general, people are more environmentally friendly at home compared to at work. They also show that the facilitators of energy saving actions at home and work are different. The findings of this study have considerable implications for pro-environmental interventions and change initiatives for both home and work contexts. By identifying the similarities and differences between contexts, and gaining a better understanding of people in each of these, we can ensure that interventions have greater success at effecting change in the longer-term and developing lifestyles that are overall more sustainable.

References

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