
The Impact of Remote Work on Organisational Culture and Employees Productivity

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Abstract

Remote work is on the rise and there are no signs that will slow down. While having the ability to work from outside the corporate office has been feasible for a few decades, working remotely has continued to become more mainstream each year with more employees demanding work flexibility from employers and companies. This paper reviews research that shows the relationship between remote work and organisational culture and its subsequent impact on key outcomes of interest, such as organisational identification, socialisation, knowledge sharing, employee turnover, and productivity. It also includes contingent conditions to examine the impact of multiple factors that moderate the relationship between remote work and organisational culture. These include social, technological, and normative conditions. Based on existing knowledge drawn from the experiences from voluntary as well as mandatory programmes for remote work. This is followed by a set of research implications and practice guidelines for introducing an organisational culture that is consistent with the new reality of increased technological utilisation and altered workforce expectations. The study suggests that both employees and managers recognize an average increase in employee productivity, where the factors desire to work remote, age and family situation have found to have significant effect on productivity.

Keywords: Remote work; organisational culture; organisational identity; employee turnover; productivity; altered workforce expectation

Introduction

Remote work is a working style that allows professionals to work outside of a traditional office environment. It is based on the concept that work does not need to be done in a specific place to be executed successfully. In other words, instead of commuting to an office each day to work from a designated desk, remote employees can execute their projects and surpass their goals wherever they please. People have flexibility to work from anywhere and design their days so that their professional and personal lives can be experienced to their fullest potential and coexist peacefully.

There are variety of ways in which people can work remotely. That is the beauty of remote work- people can choose to work in a way that makes the most sense for their lives. For example, some people have opportunity to work remotely for most of the working week, but must commute to in-person meetings at office one day in a week. Others rely on the coworking spaces to be spots where they can get the job done. Coworking spaces act as hubs of productivity, community, and technology, offering a great network connectivity and opportunities to meet others who work in the multitude of industries.

Why do people work remotely

Now the question arises why would someone choose to work outside of an office environment and better yet, why would their boss let them? The main advantages are as follows:

How remote work benefits employees

- Flexible Lifestyle
- Better Health and Wellness
- Renewed Passion for their Job

How remote work benefits employers

- Higher Productivity
- Diversity, equity, and Inclusion
- Cost Saving



- Engaged Employees

Why Remote Work Culture is on the Rise

In recent years, remote work culture continues to show a significant surge. It revolutionised the traditional workplace while fundamentally shifting our approach to work in the 21st century. Technological advancement, changing attitudes towards work-life balance, and organisational structure greatly influence this shift. The following are some of the important reasons behind the remarkable rise of remote work culture.

- **Flexibility and Work-Life Balance:** The concept of work-life balance has become increasingly crucial in today's fast paced and interconnected world. Remote work allows employees to design their schedules around personal commitments and familial responsibilities. A Forbes Survey shows that 35% of the office workers feel more productive while working remotely. Remote work culture empowers employees to create ideal work environments, resulting in a better work-life balance and heightened job satisfaction. Ultimately, the employees are happier and more motivated.
- **Cost Saving for Employers and Employees:** beyond the paradigm shift in work dynamics, remote work presents tangible financial benefits for employers and employees. These expenses include real estate costs, commuting or work-related expenses. These substantial savings improve financial well-being and make remote work culture an attractive and economically viable option.
- **Access to Global Talent Pool:** The advent of remote work culture effectively evades the geographical boundaries that once constrained hiring decisions. This transformation unlocks a vast and diverse talent pool worldwide. It offers companies access to exceptional candidates with unique skills and perspectives. This indicates a tremendous pool of skilled talent ready to work remotely with organisations.
- **Increased Productivity:** Numerous studies have widely debunked the notion that remote work decreases productivity. On the contrary, remote workers are more productive than their office-based counterparts. The increased productivity is because of fewer distractions



in remote work cultures. It allows employees to tailor workspaces to their preferences. They can concentrate and deliver exceptional results in a focussed manner.

- **Positive Impact on the Environment:** Remote work culture extends its positive influence beyond individual benefits, significantly impacting the environment. If employees work remotely half the time, greenhouse gas emissions would reduce substantially. The reduced need for daily commutes translates fewer cars on the road. This decreases the carbon emission and lessens the overall environment impact. By embracing the remote work culture, businesses can contribute to a more sustainable and eco-friendly future.
- **Enhanced Employee Satisfaction and Retention:** Employee satisfaction and retention are pivotal to maintaining a thriving workforce. Remote work culture has emerged as a powerful tool in enhancing these critical factors. The increased job satisfaction translates to higher employee retention rates. Moreover, it allows organisations to retain their top talent and foster a culture of loyalty, trust, and commitment.
- **Health and Well-being Benefits:** Health and well-being are gaining prominence. Additionally, remote work acts as a catalyst for positive changes in employees' physical and mental health. FlexJobs says work-life balance (76%), family (44%), time saving (42%), and commute stress (42%) have been put on the top four reported reasons people seek remote work. Moreover, remote employees have more opportunities to engage in physical activities and allocate time for proper self-care. This holistic approach to well-being contributes to a healthier and happier work force. Eventually, this results in increased productivity and job satisfaction.
- **Less Commute Stress:** The daily commute to and from the office is often associated with significant stress and time constraints. A remote work culture saves valuable time and reduces stress levels by eliminating the need for daily commutes. Moreover, reduced commute stress leads to improved mental health, better work-life balance, and increased job satisfaction among remote workers.
- **Technological Empowerment:** We are witnessing unprecedented advancement in communication and collaboration technologies. This propels remote work to new heights

of efficiency and effectiveness. Efficient communication tools, project management tools, and virtual collaboration platforms empower remote teams to collaborate seamlessly.

- **Pandemic Driven Adoption:** The global COVID-19 pandemic was a powerful catalyst for the widespread adoption of remote work. Overnight, businesses across industries had to transit to remote work models to ensure continuity. It also helped safeguard their employees' health and well-being.
- **Workforce Diversity and Inclusion:** Remote work opens doors to a more diverse and inclusive workforce. Companies that embrace remote work culture attract diverse talent. They foster culture of inclusion and equality. A study of BuiltIn found that diverse teams make better decisions 66% as compared to non-diverse teams. Remote work provides opportunities for talented individuals from diverse backgrounds.

Objectives of the Study

The present research paper aims to fulfil following objectives:

1. To study the influence of remote work on organisational Culture.
2. To enumerate the effects of remote work on employee productivity.
3. To study that how the organisations adapt to maintain productivity and a cohesive culture in a remote work environment.

Research Methodology

This research employs a secondary research methodology, focussing on analysis of existing literature and data on impact of remote work on organisational culture and employee productivity. The study reviews peer reviewed journal articles, industry reports, and case studies published recently to ensure relevance to the post pandemic remote work culture. The study uses a systematic literature review to identify key themes, focussing on changes in organisational communication, employee engagement, team work, and productivity metrics.



The Influence of Remote Work on Organisational Culture

Organisational culture serves many purposes. It is implicitly or explicitly dictated by an organisation's business and competitive strategy. An organisation can achieve its objectives and goals by establishing norms of behaviour that align with its strategy. In particular, with unique cultures, organisations create an identity that sets them apart from their competitors. Strong organisational culture creates dedicated and committed employees who exhibit a common sense of purpose. It lowers employee turnover, strengthens peer bonding, and increases discretionary effort. With the introduction of remote work, shared aspect of culture becomes especially vulnerable. To understand how and why this might occur, we need to first parse out the characteristics of remote work.

- **Time and Location Independence:** Remote work is carried out anytime and from anywhere. With location and time independence, there is less opportunity for informal interactions between individuals. Most meetings (face-to-face or online) must be planned and are structured. It is more difficult to reinforce commonly shared values when people do not meet in a common physical social space.
- **Autonomy:** Instead of relying on relational sources for task support, such as supervisors and co-workers, individuals are self-reliant in completing their tasks. They may utilise remote technologies (e.g., knowledge management systems, intranet databases) to accomplish their tasks. Remote workers exercise greater control over scheduling their work and their availability to other members of the organisation (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). When interactions are minimal, communicating organisational expectations by supervisors and understanding said expectations by employees can become cumbersome.
- **Use of Information Technology:** Instead of face-to-face interactions, coordination of work is carried out using information technology. While information technology enables easy transmission of explicit data and information, it is a lean communication medium. It lacks ambient visual cues and spontaneity which can help in perpetuating organisational culture. A lean medium is less effective in communicating the shared social context or creating a social presence (Raghuram, 1996).

Conditions Under Which Remote Work Will Have a Stronger/Weaker Effect on Organisational Culture

In this part of the paper moderating factors that can determine the strength of the relationship between remote work and organisational culture are outlined.

- **Type of Remote Work Programme:** There is much discussion about a hybrid approach to remote working post-pandemic, where people might want to work at least some part of the week from home. In the past, organisations experimented with different types of remote work programmes. These included a mandatory programme (accompanied by office space reduction and hoteling), where everyone, except the few top levels of hierarchy, went remote for a substantial portion of the week (e.g., IBM). On the other hand, a voluntary programme offered the flexibility of remote work based on employee needs and became the most frequently used and known remote work strategy (Raghuram et al., 2019). Even within voluntary remote work options, there were variations such as formal versus informal, fixed number of days when remote work was allowed or the days of the week it was allowed (e.g., only Tuesday through Thursday), or jobs that were eligible for remote work (e.g., only sales jobs). At times, organisations even tried to reduce travel costs (e.g., business travel to a different city/country) by encouraging communication and coordination over lean media. Before the pandemic, very few organisations had experience with mandatory programmes because on the face of it, these looked like extreme measures robbing individuals of a choice. However, the few examples we have from before are even more exemplary now under mandatory lockdown conditions. They provide lessons in how voluntary programmes can be managed as we get out of this pandemic. If the organisation is not clear about the structure of the programme, it wishes to adopt, then using multiple programme structures simultaneously or informally can lead to confusion, perceptions of inequity and supervisory/employee resistance, all of which can impact organisational culture (Golden, 2007). The structural differences draw attention to the need to clarify the exact approach that the organisation would like to adopt because each one will require its own set of practices and implementation guidelines. A lack of clarity regarding remote



work structure, will lead to a weaker link between remote work and organisational culture. Clarity in structure of remote work programme will moderate the relationship between remote work and organisational culture.

- **Employee Socialisation:** Socialisation to organisational values and norms is important for building strong culture (Van Maanen, 1975). For newcomers, this takes the form of onboarding, and for others, this takes the form of continuous reminders from the top management (Schein, 2010). However, socialisation, particularly of newcomers, can become problematic in organisations where a large proportion of employees may be working remotely. Newcomers may seek bridge-building with experienced members who can be particularly useful or relevant for carrying out their work but are not physically around (Hinds & Mortensen, 2005). Even after working for a few years, individuals remain concerned about maintaining visibility in the organisation because remote work can adversely impact network relationships. Lack of visibility in the social network can clearly damage their career prospects. This suggests that socialisation practices are likely to be a moderator between remote work and organisational culture. These socialisation practices can be carried out online by introducing peer-to-peer connections, having online informal meetups, and making sure that both in-office and remote employees are included in all events using technology. The socialisation practices used for remote workers will moderate the relationship between remote work and organisational culture.
- **Supervisory Support:** Autonomy is one of the key characteristics underlying remote work (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2008). When employees are autonomous, supervisors may experience a loss of power/authority. This is because they may find it difficult to exert control and may feel uncertain about their own goal accomplishments, especially because they cannot see what their subordinates are doing. A high-quality relationship between the supervisor and the subordinate gives confidence to the supervisors that the subordinate will act responsibly even when they are not co-present. In return, when individuals experience the supervisor's trust and support, they are likely to exert extra effort and meet or exceed their contractual expectations even when working remotely (Maslyn & Uhl-Bien, 2001; Schriesheim, Castro, & Cogliser, 1999). Some of this high-quality relationship can be

established by clarifying mutual expectations in a transparent manner and having frequent communications with supervisors, keeping information channels clear about work progress, and providing/seeking advice when necessary. During the pandemic, 88% of the employees from companies such as Hewlett Packard, Hilton, Nordstrom, and HubSpot gave their culture a very high rating (Sull & Sull, 2020). This was primarily based on honest and transparent communication from their leaders between April and August 2020. The extent of supervisory support for remote workers will moderate the relationship between remote work and organisational culture.

- **Robustness of Electronic Communication:** Another central characteristic of remote work is electronic communication. This is the primary means by which remote employees remain in contact with co-workers. Electronic communication plays an important role in bringing together the subcultures of those who are in office and those who are remote. In fact, electronic communication is especially important as a predictor of organisational identification and knowledge sharing among workers who spend a great deal of time outside of centralised office space (Golden & Raghuram, 2010; Wiesenfeld et al., 1999). To keep remote workers in the loop, it is important to have a well-established technological infrastructure. If employees do not deem the available technology support reliable and useful, then they may find it difficult to remain connected with co-workers. Smooth and easy access to communication technology enables easier connectivity and establishes a common ground for all employees, thus fostering stronger organisational culture. Prior research finds that the frequency of email communication was positively related to the extent to which remote workers identified with their organisation (Wiesenfeld et al., 1999). What this implies is that even via email, remote workers can find meaning in the organisational context and that it is possible to maintain organisational identification through a lean communication medium. While this might work for remote workers who are already familiar with organisational routines and interaction patterns, rich face-to-face interactions might still be initially necessary to create a shared interpretive context for newcomers to an organisation who are yet to be fully enculturated, that is, relate to others, understand important nuances during interactions, and recognise useful information

(Cramton, 2002; Saks, Uggerslev, & Fassina, 2007). Making robust communication technology available to remote workers will moderate the relationship between remote work and organisational culture.

- **Industry Norms:** Another factor determining the extent to which remote work will support organisational culture is the industry within which the organisation is situated. Organisations adopting remote work confront similar mimetic pressures from industries (Gordon, 1991; Peters & Heusinkveld, 2010). Examples of these industries include telecommunications (Verizon), computing (IBM), and advertising (Chiat-Day). These industries were among the first few to adopt remote work in the early 1990s. The organisations within the industries either had the technology platforms readily available to support remote work and/or had greater proportion of individuals who, because of their job characteristics (e.g., sales and customer service on site, which involve independent tasks), could readily be deployed into remote work (Raghuram et al., 2001). Thus, they all followed the industry-wide trend of introducing remote work. The alignment between organisational practices (e.g., remote work) and industry norms can also be explained by the knowledge that organisations are social networks (Granovetter, 1985). When organisations are linked by greater network ties and constrained by social relations, they follow expected group norms based on industry culture (Chatman & Jehn, 1994; Gordon, 1991). If organisations were to adopt counter-normative employment practices, they would run the risk of losing out on top talent. After all, organisations within the same industry use a similar profile of employees (i.e., skills), and to remain competitive in attracting and retaining employees, it is important to offer similar employment practices (e.g., sabbaticals and tenure in academia, benefits in tech industry in Silicon Valley). Yet another reason for adopting similar practices could be that the production technology utilised by the organisations in an industry is similar and the job description and interpersonal interdependencies on the job remain the same (e.g., auto manufacturing). The nearly standard job descriptions make it easy for organisations to categorise jobs and justify who can or cannot work remotely. Such an alignment is likely to lead to developing an organisational culture that is comfortable with remote working and develops norms of

behaviour that absorb remote work. On the other hand, when organisations refuse to adopt remote work even though the rest of the industry has, then it can lead to an organisational culture of low trust or control. The alignment between industry norms and organisational practices will moderate the relationship between remote work and organisational culture.

- **Country Norms:** In addition to industry norms, country norms can play an important role in the relationship between remote work and organisational culture because country culture acts as a constraining force on organisational culture (Johns, 2006). Evidence suggests that countries that are high in feminism (such as Sweden and Denmark) and individualism (such as the United States and the United Kingdom) are more likely to be supportive of remote working compared to countries that are higher on collectivism (such as Japan) or power distance (such as India and China) (Raghuram, London, & Larsen, 2001). The argument here is that countries that value feminism seek greater work–family balance to enhance their quality of life. Countries that are more individualistic are more comfortable with social distances and less frequent face-to-face meetings, whereas those that are high on power distance wish to maintain the command-and-control relationship between the supervisor and the subordinate (Hofstede, 1993; Peters & den Dulk, 2003; Raghuram & Fang, 2014). This is consistent with the view that organisations adopt practices that are consistent with the context/country culture that they are in (e.g., Gerhart & Fang, 2005; Rosenzweig & Nohria, 1994). If an organisation chooses a human resources (HR) practice, such as remote work, that is counter-normative to the country culture, then it is likely to stand out as an outlier in the social structure. The employees within it may not be prepared to confront the social pressures and tensions placed upon them. As an example, the family structure that exists in India makes it difficult for an employee to justify to the family members at home that they are at work even though they are located within a home space, and that they need to be left undisturbed during the ‘office hours’ (Raghuram, 2014). Adoption of remote work may appear to be a peculiarity in the societal context if it is counter-normative. However, when country culture is supportive of remote work, then the organisational culture too can be configured to mirror the expectations and norms of the society (e.g., as being family-friendly, flexible, or valuing work–family balance). The

alignment between country norms and organisational practices will moderate the relationship between remote work and organisational culture.

The effects of remote work on employee productivity

As we all know remote work has not been a widespread practice prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the shift to remote work has accelerated the attention to studying the impact of remote work on productivity and performance. Remote working is connected to several factors that will affect the financial result of the organisation, namely, workers performance and productivity, wages, absenteeism, turnover, and overall firm performance. The effect on the employee's productivity would be dependent upon several factors which are as follows:

- **Desire to work remotely**

The desire to work remotely has become more common recently and refers to the individual preference of the employees to work outside the traditional workplace. The driving factors are beneficial aspects it offers like flexibility, less time and money spent due to reduced commute, improved work-life balance, and an increase in productivity. The option to work remotely is preferred by workers at least once or more every week, and workers in the US are even willing to accept a decreased salary. Studies also suggest that the employees' own willingness to work remotely has a positive effect on performance and productivity. The flexibility and work-life balance with families also increase the desire to work remotely. Women do however have a higher aspiration than men to have the option to work remotely. However, the desire to work remotely can vary depending on individual preferences and enforced remote work can cause a negative impact on productivity.

- **Age**

Another factor related to remote work that must be studied is age. Employees tend to experience remote work different by age, since all groups are at different stages in life and have different preferences. Toscano et al. (2022) found during their study of Russian employees that as age increased the participants had fewer positive opinions regarding remote work. They further indicated less engagement and less exchange with their



supervisors than younger employees. A possible reason for this can be correlated with the lower confidence in information and communication technologies elderly employees might experience. Sharit, Hernandez & Nair (2009) conducted a study where 314 managers from different managerial levels in organisations in the US participated. Their study found that the older workers are significantly preferred over younger workers the four attributes that were stated to be most important for managers: trustworthiness, reliability, ability to work independently and time management ability. However, regarding the ability to be flexible, have a higher level of co-operation between teams and technical abilities, the younger workers were favoured. In addition to this, the younger employees are more likely to feel engaged while working remotely, that they to a higher extent have technical confidence and that they prefer to work remotely to a higher extent, it is likely that they perceive their own productivity as higher compared to the employees of higher age.

- **Family situation**

Remote work is new tool with a potential to improve life balance for families with equitable distribution between work and free time, and in turn increase equality between men and women. Remote work can have both positive and negative effects on workers with families. A greater flexibility and reduced time commuting do have a positive impact on family life but it can also have negative impact on family conflicts. Therefore, remote work has both positive and negative impacts on productivity but it has a possible positive impact on employees with home-living children.

- **Gender**

Studies have found that men and women conduct and experience remote work differently. It was found that 63% of the women preferred remote work compared to 49% men. Women with families face challenges with remote work, separating work with the overall life balance, and unpaid work in the household. The challenges for women can also be that women had more difficulties concentrating on work tasks compared to men while working remotely. One explanation for this was increased workload for taking care of children, and limited involvement from men in the overall work-life balance. Women with children do however despite this, have more positive attitude towards remote work than fathers despite

increased family demands for mothers. Remote work with its flexible work environment has been seen as a solution to accelerate gender equality and increased productivity in the long run. Women do, however, also face challenges with remote work.

Therefore, there are number of varied reasons and situations on which the effect of remote work on the productivity of the employee is dependent upon. According to various studies in most of the cases the productivity would be greatly enhanced if the conditions are positive for the employees.

Adapting Culture for Success in Hybrid and Remote Workplaces

After we discuss the trends and benefits of remote work, we are aware as of now that a long day at the office no longer requires leaving your house. The office of today can be just down the hall, and more often the future of work is hybrid and remote. Prior to the pandemic, 87% of the employers reported that most or all employees were anchored in traditional office settings. However, the scenario has drastically shifted. This evolution, while offering newfound flexibility and opportunities for both employers and employees, introduces a unique set of challenges, particularly in the realm of building and maintaining a robust company culture. No longer limited to physical spaces, it stretches across the digital realm, forging connections among a workforce that spans neighbourhoods, cities, and eleven continents.

Now the question arises that how can companies reinvent their culture for an environment where traditional office-based interactions are no longer possible, and where face-to-face communication among employees and leaders are rare. In remote or hybrid work context, company culture does not vanish, it transforms. The core beliefs and norms that shape an organisation's culture continue to develop and strengthen, but they do so outside the traditional office setting. The shift leads to a culture that is more adaptable and influenced by a range of factors, encompassing elements from employees' everyday lives outside of work. Leaders and organisations worldwide are rising to the challenge, creatively adapting their cultures for these new work environments. In this study, we will uncover how maintaining a vibrant and effective company culture in remote and hybrid settings requires thoughtful approaches and a commitment to employee well-being and collaboration.

Adapting Leadership Approaches

When it comes to making remote work successful for an organisation, the role of leadership is vital. They must adapt their approaches to foster a supportive and productive team environment, despite the lack of physical presence. Remote work can lead to the feeling of isolation among team members and challenges in maintaining work-life balance. Without in-person interactions, it is harder for managers to gauge team morale and engagement. Managers greatly influence team culture, especially in remote settings. Their approach can affect team cohesion, morale, and productivity. The following are some of the strategies that managers can follow for adapting leadership styles:

- **Empathy and Engagement:** A leader's role extends beyond managing tasks; it is about engaging team members on personal level, understanding their challenges, and providing support.
- **Encouraging Autonomy and Initiative:** Successful remote leadership is grounded in empowering team members. By encouraging them to spearhead projects or lead virtual events, leaders nurture a culture of autonomy and belonging, essential for a thriving remote team.
- **Remote Leadership Training:** It is crucial for managers to be equipped with skills tailored for remote environments. Training areas like virtual communication and understanding the nuances of remote team dynamics is vital for effective remote management.
- **Frequent Check-ins and Recognition:** Regular one-on-one meetings are key to tracking progress and tackling challenges head-on. Acknowledging and celebrating team members' achievements is equally important, as it directly correlates with employee morale and retention.
- **Flexible Management Style:** Be adaptable in setting goals and open to feedback. Embrace new tools and technologies for remote collaborations.
- **Focus on Effective Communication:** In remote or hybrid environments, effective communication is essential. Without face-to-face interactions, clear and consistent

communication is necessary to avoid misunderstandings that can disrupt workflow and cause frustration.

Conclusion

The ability to adapt and innovate your company culture is more than just a necessity. It is a defining characteristic of successful, forward-thinking organisations. Culture must be deliberate and intentional. It is multi-layered and needs to be integrated thoughtfully into each aspect of the business. This is even more true when working with remote and hybrid teams.

In a nutshell, cultivating a vibrant company culture in a remote setting is an art that intervenes defined values, robust communication, and empathetic leadership. It is about creating a virtual environment where every team member feels valued, connected, and motivated to contribute to the collective success of the organisation.

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