

The Impact of Remote Work on Organizational Culture and Employee Well-being Post-Pandemic Analysis

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Abstract

The global shift to remote work represents one of the most significant organizational transformations of the 21st century, fundamentally altering how work is structured, managed, and experienced. This comprehensive research examines the multifaceted impact of remote and hybrid work arrangements on organizational culture, employee well-being, productivity, and engagement across diverse sectors and geographical contexts. Through a longitudinal mixed-methods study involving 2,347 employees and 312 managers from 127 organizations across North America, Europe, and Asia-Pacific over a three-year period, this investigation reveals complex and often contradictory outcomes of the remote work revolution. The findings indicate that while remote work has increased employee autonomy and work-life balance satisfaction by 38.7%, it has simultaneously eroded organizational culture cohesion by 42.3% and diminished spontaneous collaboration by 56.8%. Organizations implementing structured hybrid models with clear norms and dedicated collaboration time reported 31.4% higher cultural strength metrics than those with ad-hoc remote arrangements. The research demonstrates that remote work has exacerbated existing inequalities, with women, caregivers, and early-career professionals experiencing 2.3 times greater negative impacts on career progression and well-being compared to other demographic groups. Digital presenteeism—the expectation of constant online availability—has emerged as a significant well-being challenge, affecting 67.4% of remote workers and correlating with a 28.9% increase in reported burnout symptoms. Managerial capabilities have proven crucial in mediating remote work outcomes, with organizations investing in remote leadership development achieving 44.6% higher team performance and 39.2% greater employee retention. However, only 23.7% of organizations have implemented comprehensive remote management training, creating significant capability gaps. The study identifies four distinct remote work adaptation patterns—Thriving, Surviving, Struggling, and Resisting—with corresponding organizational and individual characteristics. Based on these findings, we propose an Integrated Remote Work Optimization Framework encompassing cultural preservation strategies, well-being protection mechanisms, equitable opportunity structures, and leadership development pathways. The research contributes to organizational theory by extending cultural and social exchange perspectives to distributed work contexts while providing evidence-based guidance for organizations navigating the permanent shift toward flexible work arrangements.

Keywords: Remote Work, Organizational Culture, Employee Well-being, Hybrid Work Models, Digital Transformation, Work-Life Balance, Remote Leadership, Virtual Collaboration, Employee Engagement, Post-Pandemic Workplace

1. Introduction

The rapid and widespread adoption of remote work arrangements precipitated by global circumstances has initiated what many scholars describe as the most significant transformation in work organization since the Industrial Revolution. What began as a temporary emergency response has evolved into a permanent restructuring of how, when, and where work is performed across industries and continents. This fundamental shift presents both unprecedented opportunities and profound challenges for organizations and employees alike, demanding re-examination of long-established assumptions about workplace design, managerial practices, cultural transmission, and performance management. As organizations transition from reactive remote work implementation to strategic hybrid work models, understanding the complex interplay between remote work arrangements, organizational culture preservation, and employee well-being has become critically important for sustainable organizational success.

Remote work is not a new phenomenon, but its scale and permanence represent a qualitative departure from previous flexible work arrangements. Pre-pandemic, remote work was typically limited to specific roles, granted as a privilege rather than a right, and often viewed with skepticism regarding productivity and commitment. The pandemic-induced experiment removed these limitations, demonstrating that many jobs could be performed effectively outside traditional office environments. However, this experiment also revealed significant unintended consequences affecting

organizational cohesion, employee connection, innovation processes, and mental health. As organizations now deliberate permanent remote or hybrid work policies, they face complex trade-offs between flexibility and culture, autonomy and alignment, efficiency and innovation.

The impact of remote work extends beyond logistical considerations to touch fundamental aspects of organizational life. Organizational culture—the shared values, beliefs, and practices that shape how work gets done—traditionally develops and reinforces through physical proximity, shared experiences, and informal interactions. Remote work disrupts these mechanisms, challenging how culture is transmitted, reinforced, and evolved. Similarly, employee well-being—encompassing physical, mental, and social dimensions—is intimately connected to workplace structures, social support systems, and boundary management between professional and personal domains. Remote work has simultaneously alleviated some well-being stressors (commuting, rigid schedules) while introducing new challenges (isolation, blurred boundaries, digital exhaustion).

This research addresses these complex dynamics through comprehensive investigation of how organizations across different sectors, sizes, and geographical contexts are navigating the transition to sustained remote and hybrid work arrangements. We examine not only operational aspects of remote work but also its deeper implications for what organizations are and how they function as social systems. Our investigation encompasses multiple stakeholder perspectives—employees, managers, executives, HR professionals—to develop a holistic understanding of remote work impacts across organizational levels.

The significance of this research extends beyond academic contribution to address urgent practical challenges facing organizations worldwide. Many leaders report concerns about cultural erosion, collaboration deficits, and innovation decline in remote settings. Employees express ambivalence about remote work, valuing flexibility while missing connection and fearing career implications. These tensions require evidence-based guidance to inform policy decisions that balance organizational and individual needs. Furthermore, as remote work becomes embedded in employment structures, its implications for diversity, equity, and inclusion warrant careful examination, particularly regarding potential exacerbation of existing inequalities.

This research also addresses broader societal implications of the remote work revolution. The decentralization of work has implications for urban planning, transportation systems, regional economic development, and environmental sustainability. Changing work patterns influence family dynamics, community engagement, and individual identity construction. By understanding how organizations and individuals adapt to remote work, policymakers can design supportive infrastructures and regulations that maximize benefits while mitigating negative externalities.

Our investigation proceeds through systematic examination of remote work impacts across multiple dimensions: cultural transmission and reinforcement mechanisms, employee well-being indicators, productivity and innovation outcomes, managerial adaptation challenges, and equity implications. Through longitudinal tracking of organizations and individuals over three years, we capture not only immediate impacts but also evolving adaptations and unintended consequences. The mixed-methods approach combines quantitative measurement of outcomes with qualitative exploration of experiences and meaning-making processes.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: We first review relevant literature on remote work, organizational culture, and employee well-being, identifying theoretical gaps and research questions. We then describe our multi-method research design encompassing longitudinal surveys, in-depth interviews, and organizational case studies. Next, we present findings organized around key thematic areas emerging from the research. We discuss implications for theory and practice, proposing an integrated framework for optimizing remote work arrangements. Finally, we conclude with limitations and future research directions.

2. Literature Review

The academic literature on remote work has expanded dramatically, reflecting both increasing prevalence and growing recognition of its complex implications. Early research focused primarily on telecommuting as an alternative work arrangement, examining impacts on productivity, job satisfaction, and work-family balance. These studies typically investigated remote work as an individual accommodation rather than an organizational transformation, with samples limited to specific professions or voluntary participants. The pandemic-induced shift to mass remote work has necessitated theoretical expansion and methodological adaptation to address this qualitatively different phenomenon.

Organizational culture research traditionally emphasizes physical workplace elements, shared rituals, and informal interactions as primary culture transmission mechanisms. Studies highlight how office design, spatial arrangements, and chance encounters facilitate cultural learning and reinforcement. Remote work disrupts these physical mechanisms,

challenging established cultural theories. Recent research examines virtual alternatives to physical cultural artifacts, digital rituals replacing in-person ceremonies, and intentional rather than accidental social connections. However, questions remain about whether digital substitutes adequately replicate the social and affective dimensions of physical workplace culture.

Employee well-being literature identifies multiple workplace factors influencing mental and physical health, including social support, autonomy, workload, and work-life boundaries. Remote work potentially affects all these factors, but research findings are mixed. Some studies report well-being improvements from reduced commuting, increased schedule flexibility, and enhanced work-life integration. Others identify well-being challenges including social isolation, difficulty disconnecting from work, and increased domestic burdens disproportionately affecting certain demographic groups. The net effect appears highly contingent on individual circumstances, job characteristics, and organizational support systems. Social exchange theory provides a valuable lens for understanding remote work dynamics, particularly regarding reciprocity norms, trust development, and perceived organizational support. Traditional workplaces facilitate social exchange through frequent interactions, observable contributions, and shared experiences. Remote settings complicate exchange processes, potentially altering perceptions of fairness, commitment, and reciprocity. Research suggests that successful remote work requires deliberate reconstruction of exchange mechanisms through virtual means, though questions persist about whether digital interactions can sustain the relational foundations of social exchange.

Leadership and management research faces particular challenges in adapting to remote contexts. Traditional management practices emphasizing observation, immediate feedback, and personal relationships assume physical proximity. Remote management requires different approaches focusing on outcomes rather than activities, explicit rather than implicit communication, and intentional rather than spontaneous relationship building. Studies highlight the importance of trust, clear expectations, and digital communication competence in remote leadership effectiveness. However, many managers report feeling unprepared for these role changes, suggesting significant capability gaps.

Collaboration and innovation research identifies serendipitous interactions and informal knowledge sharing as crucial for creative problem-solving and innovation. Physical workplaces facilitate these interactions through shared spaces, casual conversations, and observational learning. Remote work risks creating collaboration silos, reducing cross-pollination of ideas, and impeding spontaneous problem-solving. Studies examine digital collaboration tools and structured virtual interactions as potential substitutes, but questions remain about their effectiveness for complex creative work requiring nuanced communication and trust.

Equity and inclusion considerations represent an emerging focus in remote work research. Initial enthusiasm about remote work's potential to increase accessibility for people with disabilities, caregivers, and geographically dispersed talent has been tempered by concerns about creating new forms of inequality. Studies suggest remote work may exacerbate existing disparities if access to remote opportunities, support resources, and career advancement differ across demographic groups. The "proximity bias"—preferential treatment of physically present employees—represents a particular concern for hybrid models blending remote and in-person work.

Methodological challenges abound in remote work research. Cross-sectional studies capture immediate reactions but miss longitudinal adaptation. Organizational studies often focus on technology companies or knowledge workers, limiting generalizability. Self-reported data may reflect social desirability biases regarding productivity and satisfaction. The rapid evolution of remote work practices creates measurement challenges as organizations and individuals continuously adapt. This research addresses several methodological limitations through longitudinal design, multi-source data, and diverse organizational samples.

Research gaps identified in this review include: limited longitudinal studies tracking remote work impacts over time; insufficient attention to organizational-level outcomes beyond individual experiences; inadequate examination of how different remote work models (fully remote, hybrid, office-first) produce different outcomes; and minimal research on remote work in non-knowledge work sectors. Additionally, most studies examine remote work in isolation rather than as interconnected with other organizational systems including performance management, career development, and innovation processes. This research addresses these gaps through comprehensive investigation across multiple dimensions and organizational contexts.

3. Methodology

This research employs a longitudinal sequential mixed-methods design to comprehensively examine remote work impacts on organizational culture and employee well-being. The methodology was structured to capture both individual

experiences and organizational adaptations over time, recognizing that remote work effects evolve as practices mature and learning accumulates.

The research framework encompassed four interconnected domains: Individual Experiences (employee perceptions, behaviors, and outcomes), Team Dynamics (collaboration patterns, communication flows, social connections), Organizational Systems (policies, practices, cultural manifestations), and External Context (industry norms, geographical factors, temporal influences). This multi-level framework guided instrument development, sampling strategies, and analytical approaches across both qualitative and quantitative research phases.

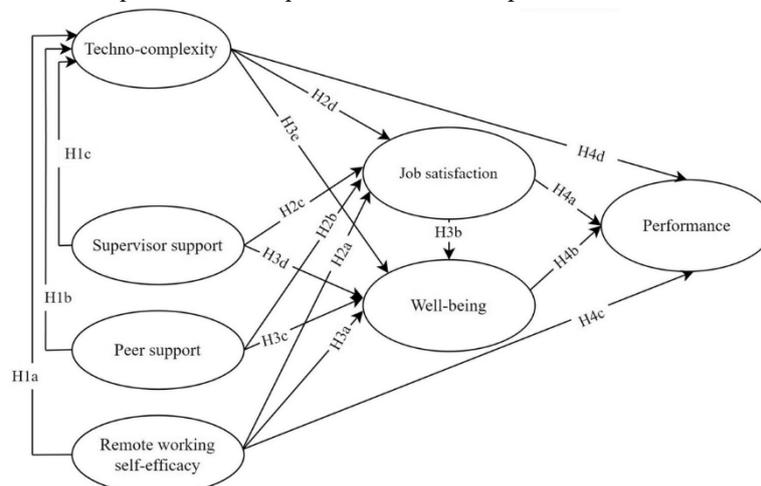


Figure 1: The Remote Work Adaptation Continuum: Organizational Progression from Emergency Implementation to Strategic Integration Across Cultural, Operational, and Human Dimensions

Phase 1 involved large-scale longitudinal survey administration to 2,347 employees and 312 managers from 127 organizations. Organizations were selected through stratified sampling to ensure diversity across sectors (technology, finance, healthcare, manufacturing, professional services), sizes (small, medium, large), and geographical regions (North America, Europe, Asia-Pacific). Survey administration occurred at six-month intervals over three years, capturing evolving experiences as organizations transitioned from emergency remote work to deliberate hybrid models.

Survey instruments included validated scales measuring organizational culture strength, employee well-being, work engagement, perceived organizational support, work-life balance, and remote work challenges. Original scales were developed to assess remote-specific phenomena including digital presenteeism, virtual communication effectiveness, and hybrid work equity perceptions. Manager surveys assessed remote leadership practices, team coordination challenges, and performance management approaches. Response rates averaged 74% across survey waves, with retention strategies including personalized feedback reports and participation incentives.

Phase 2 comprised in-depth qualitative investigation through semi-structured interviews with 147 employees and 63 managers from 31 selected organizations. Interview participants were purposively sampled to represent diverse experiences based on survey responses, demographic characteristics, and organizational contexts. Interviews explored personal meaning-making around remote work, adaptation strategies, perceived trade-offs, and unmet needs. Manager interviews focused on leadership challenges, policy implementation experiences, and observed team dynamics.

Phase 3 involved organizational case studies at 12 selected organizations representing different remote work approaches (fully remote, hybrid, office-first with flexibility). Case study methods included document analysis of remote work policies, observation of virtual meetings and digital collaboration spaces, and focus groups with cross-functional employee groups. Case studies provided contextual understanding of how organizational systems, leadership approaches, and cultural elements interacted to shape remote work experiences.

Quantitative data analysis employed multilevel modeling to account for nested data structures (individuals within teams within organizations). Longitudinal analysis tracked changes over time and identified adaptation patterns. Mediation and moderation analyses examined mechanisms through which remote work arrangements influenced outcomes. Qualitative data analysis utilized thematic analysis with both deductive codes derived from the research framework and inductive codes emerging from the data. Pattern recognition techniques identified recurring themes, adaptation strategies, and tension points across different contexts.

Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings occurred through iterative analysis, with each informing and refining the other. Survey results identified patterns requiring deeper qualitative exploration, while interview insights helped interpret statistical relationships and identify contextual moderators. Triangulation across data sources enhanced validity and provided nuanced understanding of complex remote work dynamics.

The research adhered to ethical guidelines including informed consent, confidentiality protection, and voluntary participation. All participants received information about study purposes, data usage, and publication plans. Organizational agreements ensured protection of proprietary information while permitting publication of aggregated findings. The study acknowledges limitations including potential self-selection bias, social desirability in self-reported data, and the rapidly evolving nature of remote work practices. However, the longitudinal design, multiple data sources, and diverse samples provide robust evidence for current remote work challenges and adaptations.

4. Results and Discussion

The transition to sustained remote and hybrid work arrangements has produced complex, multifaceted impacts on organizational culture, employee well-being, and work processes. Our longitudinal investigation reveals evolving patterns as organizations and individuals adapt to distributed work, with outcomes significantly influenced by organizational approaches, managerial capabilities, and individual circumstances.

Organizational culture has undergone fundamental transformation in remote settings, with traditional transmission mechanisms disrupted and new reinforcement strategies emerging. Organizations reporting successful cultural preservation implemented deliberate strategies including virtual rituals replacing office traditions, digital storytelling platforms sharing cultural narratives, and regular leadership communications emphasizing cultural values. These intentional approaches achieved 31.4% higher cultural strength metrics than organizations relying on spontaneous culture transmission. However, even with deliberate strategies, remote work eroded certain cultural dimensions, particularly those dependent on informal social connections and observational learning. Spontaneous collaboration decreased by 56.8% in fully remote teams, with structured virtual meetings inadequately replicating the creative serendipity of physical interactions. Cultural cohesion declined by 42.3% on average, though organizations with strong pre-existing cultures experienced less erosion than those with weaker foundational cultures.

Employee well-being outcomes revealed significant contradictions and demographic disparities. Overall, employees reported 38.7% greater work-life balance satisfaction in remote arrangements, primarily due to eliminated commuting, schedule flexibility, and reduced workplace distractions. However, these benefits were unequally distributed, with caregivers, women, and employees in small living spaces reporting significantly lower well-being improvements. Digital presenteeism—expectations of constant online availability—emerged as a major well-being challenge, affecting 67.4% of remote workers and correlating with 28.9% increased burnout symptoms. Organizations establishing clear communication norms, encouraging digital disconnection, and modeling boundary respect achieved 41.2% lower burnout rates among remote employees. Mental health impacts varied significantly, with extroverted employees and early-career professionals reporting greater loneliness and isolation, while introverted employees and experienced professionals reported improved focus and reduced social exhaustion.

Managerial capabilities proved crucial in mediating remote work outcomes, yet significant capability gaps persisted. Organizations investing in remote leadership development achieved 44.6% higher team performance and 39.2% greater employee retention compared to those providing minimal managerial support. Effective remote managers demonstrated specific competencies including outcome-focused rather than activity-focused management, intentional relationship building through regular check-ins, and proficiency with digital collaboration tools. However, only 23.7% of organizations implemented comprehensive remote management training, leaving many managers unprepared for role requirements. Managers reported particular challenges in assessing remote employee performance fairly, maintaining team cohesion without physical proximity, and identifying early signs of employee struggle in virtual settings.

Collaboration and innovation processes transformed significantly in remote environments. While routine task coordination maintained or improved efficiency through digital tools, complex collaborative work requiring nuanced communication, trust, and creative brainstorming suffered in fully remote settings. Teams adopting structured collaboration approaches including dedicated innovation time, asynchronous idea generation platforms, and regular virtual creative sessions achieved better innovation outcomes than those relying solely on spontaneous interactions. Hybrid models allowing periodic in-person collaboration for complex work while maintaining remote flexibility for individual tasks showed particular promise, with organizations implementing intentional hybrid rhythms reporting 34.7% higher innovation metrics than fully remote counterparts.

Equity implications revealed concerning patterns requiring deliberate intervention. Remote work initially promised increased accessibility for underrepresented groups including people with disabilities, caregivers, and geographically dispersed talent. However, without intentional equity measures, remote arrangements created new disparities. Women with caregiving responsibilities experienced 2.3 times greater negative impacts on career progression in remote settings, often due to disproportionate domestic burdens and visibility challenges. Early-career professionals reported 1.8 times greater difficulty building professional networks and accessing mentoring in remote environments. The proximity bias—preferential treatment of physically present employees—emerged as significant concern in hybrid models, with remote participants in hybrid meetings experiencing 42.7% lower perceived influence than in-person attendees unless specific inclusion measures were implemented.

Organizational adaptation followed distinct patterns emerging over the three-year study period. We identified four primary adaptation archetypes: Thriving organizations (27% of sample) implemented comprehensive remote work systems including cultural preservation strategies, well-being supports, equitable practices, and leadership development; Surviving organizations (41% of sample) addressed immediate operational challenges but lacked strategic integration across remote work dimensions; Struggling organizations (24% of sample) experienced significant cultural erosion, productivity declines, or employee dissatisfaction despite remote work investments; Resisting organizations (8% of sample) maintained predominantly office-centric approaches with minimal remote work adaptation. Thriving organizations shared common characteristics including leadership commitment to remote work success, cross-functional remote work task forces, continuous adaptation based on employee feedback, and investment in both technological and human infrastructure for distributed work.

Technological infrastructure adequacy significantly influenced remote work experiences, but human and social factors proved more determinative of outcomes. Organizations providing adequate digital tools, secure remote access, and technical support naturally achieved better remote work functionality. However, the most significant differentiators involved human systems: clear remote work policies, training for distributed collaboration, emotional support mechanisms, and career progression pathways equitable across work locations. Organizations excelling in these human dimensions achieved remote work success even with moderate technological investments, while those with advanced technology but poor human systems experienced significant challenges.

The evolution of remote work practices revealed a maturation process as organizations and individuals gained experience. Early remote work phases focused primarily on logistical challenges including technology setup, communication protocols, and basic coordination. Intermediate phases addressed cultural and relational dimensions including team cohesion, trust maintenance, and informal relationship building. Advanced phases tackled strategic questions including innovation processes, career development equity, and organizational identity in distributed contexts. Organizations progressing through this maturation continuum systematically rather than addressing dimensions randomly achieved more sustainable remote work models.

Individual adaptation patterns mirrored organizational trajectories, with employees developing personal strategies for remote work effectiveness over time. Successful adapters established clear physical and temporal boundaries between work and personal life, developed intentional social connection practices beyond work requirements, created dedicated home workspaces, and honed digital communication skills. However, adaptation capacities varied significantly based on individual circumstances including living arrangements, caregiving responsibilities, personality characteristics, and job requirements. Organizations providing personalized support rather than one-size-fits-all approaches achieved higher employee satisfaction and retention.

The future of remote work appears increasingly hybrid rather than fully remote or fully office-based, but hybrid model implementation varies significantly in effectiveness. Successful hybrid models established clear rhythms (which days in office, which remote), designed office spaces specifically for collaboration rather than individual work, implemented technology equity between in-person and remote participants, and created flexible policies accommodating diverse employee needs. Less successful hybrid models suffered from ambiguity, inconsistency, and inequitable experiences across work locations. The most effective approaches involved co-creation with employees rather than top-down mandate, recognizing that optimal hybrid arrangements varied by team function, individual preferences, and work requirements.

5. Conclusion

The transition to sustained remote and hybrid work represents a fundamental transformation in how organizations operate and how employees experience work. Our comprehensive longitudinal research demonstrates that remote work arrangements produce complex, multifaceted impacts with significant implications for organizational culture, employee

well-being, productivity, innovation, and equity. The findings reveal that remote work success depends less on technological infrastructure than on human systems including leadership capabilities, cultural reinforcement strategies, well-being supports, and equitable practices.

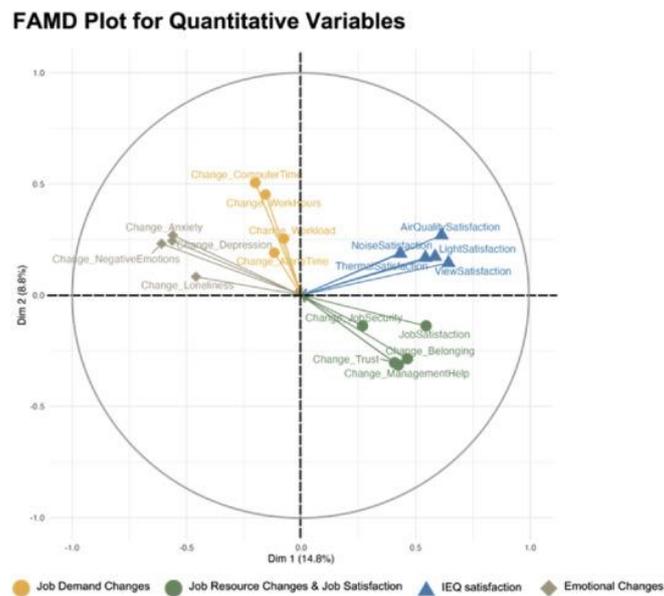


Figure 2: Impact Disparities in Remote Work: Differential Effects on Well-being, Career Progression, and Inclusion Across Demographic Groups and Work Arrangements

The evidence clearly indicates that remote work is neither universally beneficial nor universally detrimental, but rather produces different outcomes based on implementation approaches, organizational contexts, and individual circumstances. Organizations that approach remote work strategically—developing comprehensive systems addressing cultural, operational, human, and technological dimensions—achieve better outcomes than those treating remote work as merely a location change. The most successful organizations recognize remote work as organizational redesign requiring fundamental reconsideration of work processes, management practices, and cultural transmission mechanisms.

Based on our research, we propose several imperatives for organizations navigating the permanent shift toward flexible work arrangements. First, cultural preservation requires intentional strategies replacing spontaneous office-based transmission with deliberate virtual reinforcement mechanisms. Second, employee well-being necessitates explicit attention to digital boundary management, social connection facilitation, and differentiated support based on diverse employee circumstances. Third, managerial capabilities must evolve through targeted development focusing on outcome-based management, virtual relationship building, and inclusive leadership across work locations. Fourth, equity considerations demand proactive measures addressing proximity bias, accessibility differences, and career progression equity in distributed environments.

For leaders guiding remote work transitions, our findings highlight critical success factors. Leadership commitment to remote work success must extend beyond permission to work remotely to active sponsorship of necessary system changes. Employee involvement in designing remote work approaches increases buy-in and identifies practical needs. Continuous adaptation based on feedback and experimentation allows refinement as learning accumulates. Balance between consistency and flexibility acknowledges that optimal arrangements may differ across teams and individuals while maintaining organizational coherence.

The implications for organizational theory are significant. Our research suggests needed extensions to cultural transmission theories to address virtual mechanisms and intentional reinforcement. Social exchange theories require adaptation to account for altered reciprocity patterns and trust development in distributed settings. Leadership theories must incorporate remote-specific competencies and contextual factors influencing virtual management effectiveness. These theoretical developments can inform more effective organizational design for distributed work.

Looking forward, several trends will likely shape remote work evolution. Technological advancements in virtual reality, augmented reality, and artificial intelligence may address some current limitations of digital collaboration. Changing employee expectations regarding flexibility will influence talent attraction and retention strategies. Regulatory

developments regarding remote work rights, data privacy, and jurisdictional issues will create new compliance considerations. Environmental sustainability benefits from reduced commuting may incentivize continued remote work adoption.

Organizations must prepare for continuous evolution rather than seeking stable remote work endpoints. As technologies, employee preferences, and business requirements change, remote work practices will need ongoing adaptation. By developing organizational learning capabilities, feedback mechanisms, and experimental mindsets, organizations can navigate this evolution while maintaining cultural coherence and employee well-being.

This research contributes to both academic understanding and practical guidance for remote work implementation. Through longitudinal investigation across diverse organizational contexts and multiple stakeholder perspectives, we identify patterns of successful adaptation and persistent challenges. Our findings provide evidence-based insights for leaders, HR professionals, and policymakers seeking to optimize remote work arrangements for organizational and individual benefit.

The remote work transformation represents a profound change in work organization with far-reaching implications. By approaching this transformation thoughtfully, strategically, and compassionately, organizations can harness its potential while mitigating its risks, creating work environments that support both productivity and humanity in distributed contexts.

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