

Global perspectives on redefining workplace presence: the impact of remote work on organizational culture

Stephanie Bilderback and Matthew D. Kilpatrick

College of Business, Austin Peay State University, Clarksville, Tennessee, USA

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to explore the impact of remote work on organizational culture, focusing on redefining workplace presence during the COVID-19 pandemic. It examines changes in communication patterns, employee engagement and leadership practices, offering insights into how organizations can adapt their cultural frameworks for a remote or hybrid workforce.

Design/methodology/approach – Using a conceptual approach, this paper draws on existing literature, theories and case studies to analyze the implications of remote work for organizational culture. It examines the practical applications of theoretical frameworks such as Kotter's 8-Step Change Model, the Competing Values Framework, Social Exchange Theory, Role Theory, Self-Determination Theory and Equity Theory.

Findings – The findings indicate that the transition to remote work necessitates changes in communication patterns, collaboration, employee engagement and the sense of belonging. It also highlights the critical role of leadership in fostering a positive remote work culture, requiring organizations to adapt to a paradigm where presence is measured by engagement and productivity rather than physical visibility.

Originality/value – This paper contributes to understanding the impact of remote work on organizational culture by integrating various theoretical frameworks and providing practical implications for managing remote work environments. It comprehensively analyzes the challenges and opportunities the shift to remote work presents and provides recommendations for organizations to navigate this transition successfully.

Keywords Employee engagement, Organizational culture, Remote work

Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly shifted the global work landscape, making remote work a prevalent mode of operation for many organizations. Mukherjee and Narang (2023) stated that an initial temporary solution, remote work, has become more permanent, leading to a reevaluation of conventional workplace norms and practices. Amankwah-Amoah *et al.* (2021) indicated that maintaining business continuity while adhering to social distancing measures has accelerated the adoption of remote work practices, transforming the traditional office-based environment into a flexible and virtual setting. Tesluk *et al.* (1997)

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stated that understanding the impact of the shift to remote work on organizational culture is crucial, as organizational culture shapes employee behavior, motivation and overall performance. Although this study was conducted over two decades ago, its foundational concepts remain relevant in analyzing modern shifts such as remote work, where organizational culture continues to be a critical factor in employee engagement. [Asatiani et al. \(2021\)](#) highlighted that moving to remote work challenges traditional notions of workplace presence, collaboration and communication, raising questions about sustaining and nurturing organizational culture in a virtual environment. Addressing disparities in employee experiences and perceptions of remote work is essential for effective remote work policies and practices.

The evolution of workplace presence

Workplace presence has historically been a fundamental aspect of organizational culture, shaping employee interactions, collaboration and contributions to collective goals. [Bolino et al. \(2021\)](#) noted that physical presence in the office was synonymous with productivity and commitment, with the traditional 9-to-5 workday as a standard for measuring engagement and performance. This paradigm, rooted in the industrial era's emphasis on time-based labor and physical oversight, equated visibility with value and effectiveness. Similarly, [Babapour Chafi et al. \(2021\)](#) emphasized that transitioning from office-based work to remote environments represents a significant shift in understanding workplace presence. Likewise, [Nagy \(2020\)](#) noted that digital technologies and the internet have gradually eroded the boundaries of the physical office, enabling employees to work virtually anywhere. The COVID-19 pandemic catalyzed widespread remote work adoption, challenging traditional beliefs about the necessity of physical presence for productivity and collaboration.

In remote work, presence extends beyond physical visibility to virtual availability and engagement. [Lee \(2023\)](#) highlighted that digital presence, shown through active participation in virtual meetings, timely communication and task responsiveness, has become a new measure of involvement and commitment. This shift to remote work requires organizations to reconsider how they manage and monitor employees, emphasizing the importance of outcomes and impact over physical attendance. [Sewell and Taskin \(2015\)](#) discussed how telework challenges traditional notions of autonomy and control, necessitating a reevaluation of organizational norms and values. Likewise, [Rishi et al. \(2021\)](#) noted that the evolution of workplace presence reshapes organizational culture, necessitating a redefinition of what it means to be present, engaged and productive in a modern work environment. This evolution's implications affect performance measurement, reward systems and fostering a sense of community and belonging among the workforce. As remote work remains prevalent, organizations must navigate this new paradigm's challenges and opportunities, embracing flexibility, leveraging technology and fostering a culture of trust and accountability.

The impact of remote work on organizational culture

The shift to remote work has significantly altered organizational communication patterns and collaboration. [Kahlow et al. \(2020\)](#) observed that virtual meetings, emails and instant messaging have replaced traditional face-to-face interactions, changing team dynamics. While these digital tools offer flexibility and convenience, [Schlenkrich and Upfold \(2009\)](#) highlighted that they can also lead to communication challenges such as misunderstandings, reduced nonverbal cues and information overload. Consequently, [Garg and Ranga \(2024\)](#) suggested that the organizations' reliance on technology for communication necessitates reevaluating collaboration strategies, emphasizing clarity, inclusivity and regular check-ins to ensure effective teamwork in a remote environment.

Remote work also profoundly affects employee engagement and their sense of belonging. Wang *et al.* (2020) noted that physical separation from colleagues and the workplace can lead to isolation and disconnection, impacting motivation and commitment. To address this, Dinh *et al.* (2021) suggested that organizations must proactively create opportunities for social interaction and team building, even in a virtual setting, to maintain a sense of community and connectedness among employees. Regular virtual social events, informal chat groups and recognition programs can help reinforce a sense of belonging and engagement in a remote work culture.

Maintaining a cohesive culture in a remote setting presents significant challenges. Akpa *et al.* (2021) highlighted that the absence of a shared physical space can make it difficult to foster a unified organizational identity and shared values. To address this, Grojean *et al.* (2004) suggested that companies must intentionally articulate and reinforce their culture through clear communication, role modeling by leaders and embedding cultural values in policies and practices. Despite the passage of time, Grojean *et al.*'s findings about leadership and organizational climate are still applicable today as companies navigate the cultural shifts brought on by remote work. Regular virtual town hall meetings, transparent leadership communication and opportunities for employee input can help reinforce a sense of shared purpose and cultural cohesion (Yue *et al.*, 2021). Similarly, Antonacopoulou and Georgiadou (2021) emphasized that leadership is crucial in fostering a positive remote work culture. Leaders must adapt their management styles to remote work's demands, prioritizing empathy, trust and flexibility. Dinh *et al.* (2021) noted that influential remote leaders communicate clearly and frequently, set clear expectations and provide support and resources for their teams to succeed. They also play a crucial role in modeling desired behaviors and attitudes, shaping the remote work culture to prioritize responsiveness, accountability and results over physical presence.

Integrating remote work into organizational culture requires rethinking performance management and recognition practices. Newman and Ford (2021) noted that traditional metrics based on visibility and office time may no longer be relevant remotely. Instead, Riyanto *et al.* (2021) suggested that performance evaluations focus on outcomes, work quality and achieving specific goals. Recognizing and rewarding employees for their contributions in a remote setting can reinforce the value of their work and motivate continued high performance (Dong *et al.*, 2020). Likewise, Haque (2023) observed that the impact of remote work on organizational culture is multifaceted, affecting communication, collaboration, engagement and cohesion. Henke *et al.* (2022) emphasized that leadership is pivotal in navigating these changes, ensuring the organization's culture adapts and thrives in a remote work environment. By addressing these challenges proactively, organizations can leverage remote work benefits while maintaining a strong and positive culture that supports employee well-being and productivity.

Perceptions of productivity and performance

The debate over remote work's impact on productivity has been ongoing among scholars, practitioners and policymakers. Spicer (2020) argued that remote work offers flexibility, reduces commute times and can lead to higher productivity. On the contrary, Ferrara *et al.* (2022) raised concerns about potential distractions, decreased oversight and challenges in maintaining a clear separation between work and personal life. Empirical evidence presents a mixed picture, with some studies indicating increased productivity in remote settings while others highlight potential drawbacks. This ongoing debate emphasizes the need for a nuanced understanding of how remote work affects productivity and the factors that influence its success (Choi and Cho, 2019).

Similarly, academic integrity in online settings has significantly impacted performance and learning quality, which can be extrapolated to the professional remote work environment (Ayoub/Al-Salim and Aladwan, 2021). Ostapenko *et al.* (2022) noted that presence bias, the tendency to equate workplace visibility with productivity, plays a significant role in performance evaluations in a traditional office setting. Presence bias can be exacerbated in a remote work environment, where managers may find it challenging to assess performance based on direct observation (Priya *et al.*, 2022). Consequently, Franken *et al.* (2021) observed that less visible employees due to remote work or flexible schedules might be perceived as less productive or committed, regardless of their actual output. Overcoming presence bias requires a shift in mindset, where performance is assessed based on results and outcomes rather than physical presence.

Organizations must develop clear and measurable performance metrics to support productivity in a remote environment aligned with business goals. Rompho (2023) suggested that objectives and key results or key performance indicators can provide a framework for setting expectations and evaluating performance. Regular check-ins and progress reviews can help employees stay on track and receive timely feedback on their work. Correspondingly, Gallacher and Hossain (2020) emphasized that effective communication is crucial in supporting productivity in a remote setting. Beckel and Fisher (2022) noted that clear guidelines on communication channels, response times and meeting protocols can help streamline interactions and reduce inefficiencies. Providing employees with the right tools and technology is essential for facilitating collaboration and enabling them to perform their tasks effectively.

Training and development opportunities can further enhance productivity in a remote work environment. Equipping employees with skills in time management, digital literacy and self-motivation can empower them to work more effectively and independently (Sandoval-Reyes *et al.*, 2021). In addition, fostering a continuous learning and improvement culture can encourage employees to seek ways to enhance their productivity and performance (Akdere and Egan, 2020). Managing perceptions of productivity and performance in a remote work environment requires a multifaceted approach (Mihalca *et al.*, 2021). Organizations can support and improve productivity in remote work by addressing presence bias, setting clear performance metrics, ensuring effective communication, providing necessary tools and training and fostering continuous improvement.

Redefining organizational values and norms

The shift to remote work has emphasized the need for adaptability and flexibility in organizational values. Traditional values emphasizing physical presence and fixed working hours are challenged by remote work's realities, which require a more dynamic and responsive approach (Shipman *et al.*, 2023). Organizations must embrace adaptability as a core value, allowing them to quickly adjust to changing circumstances, such as fluctuating workloads, employee needs and external factors like global events or technological advancements (Shet, 2024). This shift toward valuing adaptability is essential for thriving in a remote work environment by leveraging flexibility to drive innovation, responsiveness and resilience (Miceli *et al.*, 2021).

Palumbo *et al.* (2021) noted that the evolution of work–life balance and flexibility norms is another significant aspect of the transition to remote work. Similarly, Mordi *et al.* (2023) observed that the traditional separation between work and personal life has become blurred, with employees working from home and often juggling professional responsibilities alongside family and personal commitments. Arampatzi and Burger (2020) highlighted that organizations are redefining norms to prioritize work–life balance. They recognize that employees who feel supported in managing their personal and professional lives are likelier

to be engaged, satisfied and productive. This includes offering flexible working hours, providing resources for mental and physical well-being and fostering a culture that respects boundaries and encourages regular breaks and time off.

Inclusivity and diversity have also gained prominence in the context of remote work. [De la Roche and Simović \(2023\)](#) and the [World Health Organization \(2010\)](#) noted that remote work could level the playing field by offering opportunities to individuals who may have faced barriers to traditional office-based employment, such as people with disabilities, caregivers or those living in remote areas. In addition, [Rasheed et al. \(2023\)](#) observed that remote work also challenges ensuring that all employees feel included and valued, regardless of location, background or circumstances. To address this, [Siri et al. \(2022\)](#) suggested that organizations must actively promote inclusivity by ensuring that remote work policies and practices are accessible and equitable and by fostering a culture that celebrates diversity and encourages sharing diverse perspectives and experiences. [Bagga et al. \(2023\)](#) highlighted that leaders are crucial in driving changes in organizational values and norms. [Haque \(2023\)](#) emphasized that leaders must lead by example, embrace adaptability, champion work–life balance and promote inclusivity in their actions and decisions. This includes providing clear communication about expectations and changes, offering support and resources to help employees navigate the transition to remote work and creating opportunities for connection and collaboration that reinforce a sense of belonging and shared purpose.

Regular feedback and open dialogue are essential in redefining organizational values and norms. [Riratanaphong and Van der Voordt \(2015\)](#) suggested that organizations should encourage employees to share their experiences, challenges and suggestions for improvement. This feedback can inform ongoing adjustments to remote work policies and practices, ensuring they align with employee needs and evolving organizational goals. In addition, [Carroll and Conboy \(2020\)](#) emphasized that transitioning to remote work necessitates rediscovering organizational values and norms. By embracing adaptability and flexibility, prioritizing work–life balance and fostering inclusivity and diversity, [Bello et al. \(2024\)](#) noted that organizations can create a remote work culture that supports the well-being and productivity of their employees. Leadership, communication and ongoing feedback are essential to successfully navigating this transformation and building a resilient and inclusive remote work environment.

Case studies

The transition to remote work has prompted organizations across various sectors to rethink and adapt their cultures to accommodate this new mode of operation. The following case studies provide insights into how different organizations have successfully navigated the shift to remote work, highlighting the strategies used, challenges encountered and critical lessons learned in the process.

Organization A: Twitter embraces remote work

Twitter, known for its innovative culture, swiftly adapted to remote work by leveraging its robust digital infrastructure ([Saura et al., 2022](#)). They implemented virtual collaboration tools, online training programs and regular virtual check-ins to maintain team cohesion. The company also introduced flexible working hours to accommodate employees' varying schedules and time zones. Key lessons learned included the importance of clear communication, the need for regular virtual team-building activities and the value of providing employees with the necessary tools and resources to work effectively from home.

Organization B: Older Adults Technology Services adapts to remote work for global impact
Older Adults Technology Services focused on global development adapted to remote work to continue its mission during the pandemic (Weil et al., 2021). They used digital platforms to coordinate projects, communicate with stakeholders and conduct virtual fundraising events. The organization faced challenges in maintaining a sense of community and ensuring effective collaboration across different time zones. Lessons learned included the need for regular virtual team meetings, the importance of setting clear expectations for availability and the value of celebrating achievements to foster a sense of belonging.

Organization C: Anara Fashion Fusion prioritizes employee well-being

With a large workforce, Anara Fashion Fusion transitioned to remote work for its corporate employees while ensuring the safety of its frontline workers (Bhansali and Pandey, 2024). The company prioritized employee well-being by offering mental health support, virtual training classes and flexible scheduling. They faced challenges in maintaining company culture and employee engagement. To address these challenges, the company organized virtual social events, encouraged open communication and recognized employees' contributions to keep morale high.

Organization D: Middle East College shifts to online learning

Middle East College quickly shifted to online learning to continue educating its students (Guangul et al., 2020). They trained faculty in online teaching methods, provided students access to digital resources and implemented virtual advising and support services. The institution faced challenges ensuring equitable access to technology and maintaining student engagement. Lessons learned included the importance of regular check-ins with students, interactive online learning tools and ongoing support for faculty and students in adapting to the online environment.

These case studies emphasize organizations' diverse and innovative approaches to adapting their cultures for remote work. Their experiences highlight the importance of flexibility, communication and a strong focus on employee well-being in successfully transitioning to a remote work environment. As the work landscape evolves, these lessons provide valuable insights for other organizations looking to navigate the challenges and opportunities of remote work.

Practical implications

The following section outlines how established theories can be adapted to the context of remote work. These theories provide a structured approach for organizations to navigate the complexities of a dispersed workforce while maintaining a strong organizational culture. The transition to remote work has significant practical implications for organizations seeking to adapt their working environments to the new reality. Drawing on established theories can provide valuable insights and guidance for effectively implementing changes. Understanding and applying these theoretical frameworks helps organizations to navigate the challenges of remote work and create a more supportive and productive environment for their employees. Below, [Table 1](#) outlines critical concepts, associated theories and their explanations in the context of remote work:

Kotter's 8-Step Change Model (Kotter, 1996), traditionally applied to large-scale organizational changes, is particularly relevant in the shift to remote work. By clearly communicating the benefits and setting clear goals, organizations can gain employee buy-in, which is essential for successfully adopting remote work practices. The Competing Values Framework (Cameron and Quinn, 2011) allows organizations to balance the need for

Table 1. Practical implications of theoretical frameworks for remote work environments

Key concept	Theory	Explanation
Change management	Kotter's 8-step change model (Kotter, 1996)	Apply a structured approach to implement remote work policies, ensuring clear communication and employee buy-in
Organizational flexibility	Competing values framework (Cameron and Quinn, 2011)	Balance flexibility and stability by fostering a culture that values adaptability and innovation
Trust and collaboration	Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964)	Enhance communication and collaboration by building trust through transparent interactions and mutual support
Work–life balance	Role theory (Katz and Kahn, 1978)	Support employees in managing their professional and personal roles through flexible scheduling and clear boundaries
Employee engagement and motivation	Self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci, 2000)	Promote intrinsic motivation by providing autonomy, meaningful feedback and growth opportunities
Inclusivity and equity	Equity theory (Adams, 1965)	Ensure fairness by treating remote and in-office employees equitably and providing equal access to resources

Notes: This table summarizes critical theoretical frameworks and their practical implications for managing remote work environments. Organizations should consider these theories as guidelines and adapt them to their specific context and needs for optimal results

Source: Authors' own work

stability with the flexibility required by remote work. By fostering an adaptable culture, companies can respond swiftly to the changing demands of a remote workforce.

Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) emphasizes the importance of building trust through transparent communication and mutual support, crucial for enhancing collaboration in remote work environments. Role Theory (Katz and Kahn, 1978) highlights the need for organizations to support employees in balancing their professional and personal roles, which can be achieved through flexible scheduling and establishing clear boundaries. Self-Determination Theory (Ryan and Deci, 2000) underscores the importance of promoting intrinsic motivation by providing employees with autonomy, meaningful feedback and growth opportunities – particularly important in a remote work context where maintaining motivation can be challenging. Finally, Equity Theory (Adams, 1965) ensures that all remote or in-office employees are treated fairly and have equal access to resources, essential for maintaining morale and productivity in a dispersed workforce.

By integrating these theories into their strategies, organizations can create a supportive and effective remote work environment that addresses both the organizational and employee's needs. The practical implications of these theories highlight the importance of a thoughtful and theory-driven approach to managing remote work, enabling organizations to navigate the immediate challenges posed by the transition to remote work while laying the foundation for a more flexible, inclusive and resilient workplace.

Conclusion

In summary, the impact of remote work on organizational culture is multifaceted and profound. Belle *et al.* (2015) observed that the shift to remote work has necessitated changes in communication patterns, collaboration, employee engagement and the sense of belonging. Byrd (2022) highlighted that it has also challenged organizations to maintain a cohesive

culture and emphasized the critical role of leadership in fostering a positive remote work culture. Likewise, [Hafermalz \(2021\)](#) noted that the redefinition of workplace presence has emerged as a key theme, with organizations recognizing the need to adapt to a new paradigm where presence is measured by engagement and productivity rather than physical visibility. As remote and hybrid work models become increasingly dominant, [Hopkins and Bardoel \(2023\)](#) argued that organizations must embrace a more flexible and inclusive approach to workplace presence. This includes valuing the contributions of remote employees, leveraging technology to enhance virtual collaboration and fostering a culture that supports work–life balance and well-being.

Organizations must proactively shape their culture in the remote work era. Successfully shaping organizational culture in the remote work era requires committing to continuous learning, adapting to new challenges and challenging traditional norms to embrace innovative working methods. By doing so, organizations can create a remote work culture that supports their immediate needs and positions them for success in the evolving work landscape. The transition to remote work presents challenges and opportunities for organizational culture ([Raghuram, 2021](#)). By understanding the impact of remote work, redefining workplace presence and taking proactive steps to shape their culture, organizations can navigate this transition successfully and emerge stronger in the remote work era.

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Corresponding author

Stephanie Bilderback can be contacted at: bilderbacks@apsu.edu