

Remote Work and the Changing Organization: Management, Productivity and Employee Well-Being in the Post-Pandemic Workplace

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ABSTRACT

Remote and hybrid work moved from the margins of organizational life to the center of it within a matter of weeks in 2020, and a large share of it has stayed. This article reviews what the research says about what that shift means for organizations. It traces the evolution of remote work, sets out the main theoretical perspectives, and then looks at productivity, motivation, work-life boundaries, management practices, digital collaboration and organizational culture. It also considers inequality and access, hybrid arrangements, international evidence and the future of work. The main argument is that the evidence does not support either the strong optimistic claim (remote work simply raises productivity and well-being) or the strong pessimistic one (remote work erodes performance and culture). Outcomes seem to depend on the type of work, the intensity of remote work, the quality of management, and who is choosing or being assigned to work remotely. Much of the best evidence comes from a small number of firms and from the United States and China, so I treat generalization with caution throughout.

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Introduction

For most of the twentieth century, going to work meant going somewhere. In spring 2020 that stopped being true for a very large number of office-based employees, and, to the surprise of many managers, organizations kept functioning. Whether they functioned *well* is a different question, and it is one that people have argued about ever since. Some executives describe remote work as a threat to culture, mentoring and innovation. Some employees describe it as the most valuable change to working life in decades. Both camps can point to some evidence, which is part of what makes this topic hard to write about.

I should say at the start what this article is and is not. It is a literature-based review, written from a management and organizational perspective, and it is not a new empirical study. I have tried to lean on peer-reviewed studies and on institutional publications, and to give more weight to research that uses experiments, natural experiments or administrative data than to opinion surveys. Where I rely on self-reported survey data I say so. Where a claim is my own interpretation and not something a cited study establishes, I try to flag it as such. I also try not to generalize from single studies. A field experiment in a Chinese call center, for example, is very informative, but it is one firm in one country doing one type of task.

The article is organized as follows. The first section gives a short history of remote work. The second reviews theoretical perspectives. The third to eighth sections cover productivity, motivation and well-being, boundaries, management practices, digital collaboration and culture. The ninth to twelfth cover inequality and access, hybrid work, international evidence and the future of work. Two tables and two figures are included, and the article ends with limitations and conclusions.

The Evolution of Remote Work

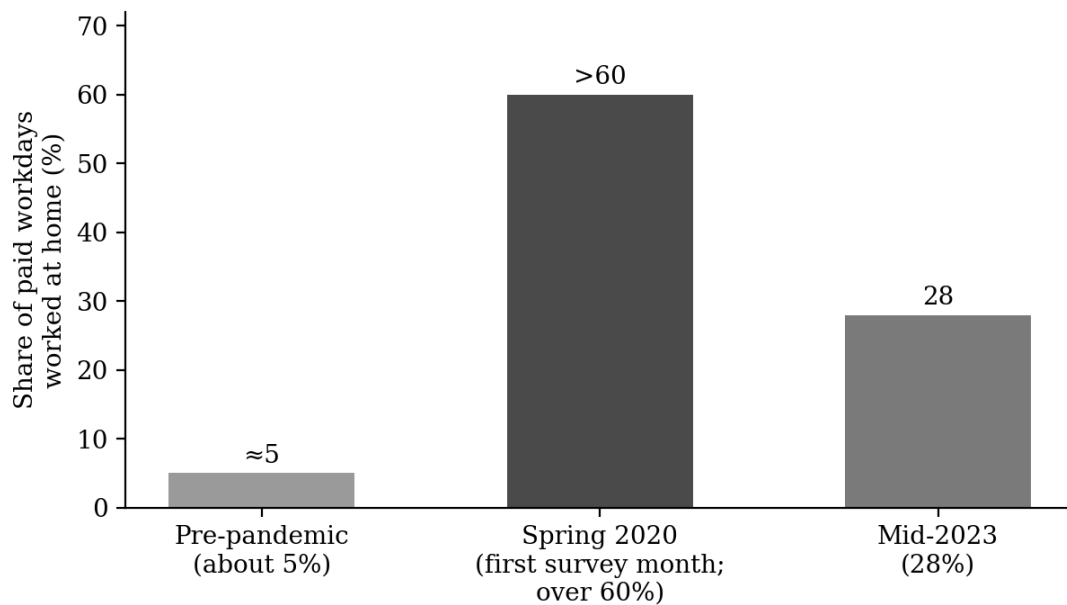
The idea is older than the internet. Nilles (1975) wrote about the possibility of replacing some commuting with telecommunications, and the term "telecommuting" is often traced to that early work. For decades, though, remote work stayed a niche arrangement. It was used by particular occupations, by some professionals and by some firms experimenting with flexibility, but it was not the default for anyone. Eurofound and the International Labour Organization (ILO; 2017), in a study covering a range of countries, described how information and communication technologies had made "telework" and mobile work more common, but also emphasized that it remained a minority practice and that its effects on work were mixed.

The academic literature before 2020 was already reasonably large. Gajendran and Harrison (2007) conducted a meta-analysis of studies of telecommuting and found generally small positive associations with perceived autonomy, job satisfaction and performance, and lower turnover intention, with little evidence of harm to relationships with coworkers unless telecommuting was very intensive. Allen et al. (2015) later reviewed the field again and concluded, in broad terms, that the effects were often modest and depended on how much people worked remotely and on other conditions. In other words, the research on pre-pandemic remote work was already hedged. Most of it relied on people who had *chosen* to telework and on jobs that were suited to it.

Then came the pandemic. Barrero et al. (2021) estimated, using their Survey of Working Arrangements and Attitudes (SWAA), that about 5 percent of full paid workdays in the United States were done from home before the pandemic, and that this rose above 60 percent in the first month of their survey in 2020. By mid-2023, they report, full days worked at home accounted for 28 percent of paid workdays among Americans aged 20 to 64, about four times the 2019 rate (Barrero et al., 2023). Figure 1 summarizes these figures. The three bars are not perfectly comparable, since the surveys and measurement methods changed over time, so they should be read as approximate orders of magnitude and not as a precise time series.

Figure 1

Share of Paid Workdays Worked at Home in the United States



Note. Approximate values drawn from Barrero et al. (2021, 2023), based on the Survey of Working Arrangements and Attitudes. Survey methods changed over time, so the bars are not strictly comparable.

Two things stand out to me. First, the increase was so fast and so broad that it looked less like the adoption of a management practice and more like a shock. Second, the shift did not simply reverse when restrictions ended. Barrero et al. (2023) argue that several factors made the shift durable, including changes in employee preferences, improvements in technology and the gradual adaptation of management practices, and that executives themselves expected only modest further changes in the near term. I would treat these as reasonable but still provisional interpretations, since they rest partly on survey data and on the SWAA's own methods.

It is also important to remember who was affected. Dingel and Neiman (2020) estimated that about 37 percent of jobs in the United States could plausibly be done entirely at home, and that this share differed strongly by occupation and across countries. The "remote work revolution" was therefore a revolution for a particular segment of the workforce, mostly people in professional, managerial and administrative jobs. I return to this in the section on inequality.

Theoretical Perspectives

Remote work has been studied through several theoretical lenses, and they do not always agree. I find it useful to think of them as answering different questions.

Job Demands and Resources, and Work Design

The job demands-resources (JD-R) model holds that job characteristics can be grouped into demands (which drain energy) and resources (which support motivation and buffer against demands), and that well-being and performance depend on their balance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti et al., 2001). Applied to remote work, this framework makes it clear why the same arrangement can be good for one person and bad for another. Autonomy and no commute are resources. Isolation, blurred boundaries and poor equipment are demands. Wang et al. (2021), writing from a work-design perspective during the pandemic, made a similar argument. They identified challenges of remote working (social isolation, work-home interference, poor communication and ineffective monitoring, among others) and argued that job autonomy, social support and self-discipline could help people cope. Their framework is conceptual and based on a review and a survey, so it is more a lens than a proof, but I found it a helpful way of organizing the mixed evidence.

Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination theory proposes that people are motivated and thrive when their needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness are supported (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Remote work can support autonomy, because people gain control over where and sometimes when they work. It can threaten relatedness, because it removes many informal contacts. Competence can go either way: quiet, focused time can help, while limited feedback can hurt. This theory predicts that the effect of remote work depends on which need dominates for a given person and a given job, which fits the mixed findings I discuss below.

Boundary and Border Theories

Boundary theory (Ashforth et al., 2000) and work/family border theory (Clark, 2000) describe how people create, maintain and cross the borders between work and other domains. Some people prefer to segment the two, and others prefer to integrate them, and the fit between preference and environment matters. Kreiner et al. (2009) showed, in a study of Episcopal priests, that people use different tactics to manage boundaries, and that misfit between preferences and what the environment allows produces tension. This is not a study of remote work, and I would not claim it is, but its logic transfers well to home-based work, where physical separation disappears.

Media Richness and Social Presence

Media richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1986) argues that communication media differ in their capacity to convey information and to resolve ambiguity, and that effective communication involves matching the medium to the task. Social presence theory (Short et al., 1976) focuses on the degree to which a medium conveys the sense of the other person being there. Both have been criticized and revised over the years, and I would not treat either as a law. But they help explain why an organization might find routine coordination easy on chat and yet struggle with complex, ambiguous or emotionally loaded conversations.

Virtuality and Distributed Teams

Gibson and Gibbs (2006) argued that "virtuality" is a matter of degree and involves several dimensions, such as geographic dispersion, reliance on electronic communication and national diversity, and that these dimensions have different effects on teams. Hinds and Bailey (2003) proposed that distribution can produce conflict through specific mechanisms, and Cramton (2001) described the "mutual knowledge problem," in which dispersed team members fail to share and retain contextual information about each other. Maznevski and Chudoba (2000), studying global virtual teams, found that effectiveness was linked to how communication rhythms fit the team's tasks and needs. Most of this research pre-dates the pandemic and concerns teams that were *designed* to be distributed. Whether its conclusions apply equally to firms that suddenly went remote is an open question, and I think it is one that needs more empirical work.

Organizational Productivity

Productivity is where the public argument is loudest, and also where the evidence is most easily misread. I think it helps to separate three questions. First, what happens to output when the *same* worker moves from the office to home? Second, how do people who *choose* remote work differ from those who do not? Third, what happens to the organization, as opposed to the individual, in the longer run?

The Individual-Level Evidence

The best-known early study is the Ctrip experiment. Bloom et al. (2015) randomly assigned call-center employees who volunteered for home working to work from home or in the office for nine

months. Home working led to a 13 percent performance increase, about 9 percent from working more minutes per shift (fewer breaks and sick days) and 4 percent from more calls per minute. The authors also reported higher work satisfaction and lower attrition among home workers, but a lower promotion rate conditional on performance. It is a very good study because of the random assignment, but its limits are obvious: one company, a routine task with measurable output, and volunteers.

Other studies find less positive results. Emanuel and Harrington (2024), studying a call center at a Fortune 500 firm, found that before COVID-19 remote workers answered 12 percent fewer calls per hour than on-site workers. After offices closed, the gap narrowed by 4 percent, and formerly on-site workers' call quality and promotion rates declined. Even with everyone remote, an 8 percent gap persisted, which the authors interpret as negative selection into remote jobs. In their cost-benefit analysis, savings from reduced turnover and office rents could outweigh the negative productivity effect, but not the cost of attracting less productive workers. Gibbs et al. (2023), using personnel and analytics data on information technology professionals in an Asian firm, reported lower productivity under working from home, with hours worked increasing. I do not want to lean on the exact magnitudes here, because I have not been able to verify them independently of the abstracts, but the direction of the finding contrasts with Bloom et al. (2015).

Choudhury et al. (2021) looked at a "work-from-anywhere" program at the United States Patent and Trademark Office, in which patent examiners could move away from the office, and found productivity gains, though of modest size. This is a different kind of job again: knowledge work, individual tasks and a public agency.

Put together, these studies do not tell one story. The difference may come from the task (routine call handling versus creative or collaborative work), from context (a firm's prior management practices, the pandemic environment, the workers' home conditions), from selection (who chooses remote work), and from what is measured. That is, I think, the sober reading. Table 2 summarizes the main studies I rely on, with their designs and limits.

Table 2
Selected Empirical Studies Cited in This Article

Study	Context and design	Main reported finding	Key limitation
Bloom et al. (2015)	Chinese travel agency call center; randomized, 9 months, volunteers	13% performance increase; attrition halved; promotion rate conditional on performance fell	One firm; routine, measurable task; volunteers
Bloom et al. (2024)	Trip.com, China; randomized hybrid trial (2 days home), 1,612 employees, 6 months	Attrition down 33%; no damage to performance or promotion	One firm; one hybrid design; volunteers
Emanuel & Harrington (2024)	U.S. Fortune 500 call center; difference-in-differences around office closures	Remote workers answered 12% fewer calls pre-pandemic; 8% gap persisted with all remote (selection); call quality and promotion fell for formerly on-site staff	One firm; pandemic conditions
Gibbs et al. (2023)	IT professionals at an Asian firm; personnel and analytics data	Lower productivity under working from home, with hours increasing (magnitudes not relied on here)	One firm; pandemic lockdown period
Choudhury et al. (2021)	U.S. patent office; work-from-anywhere program	Productivity gains of modest size	Public agency; individual task
Yang et al. (2022)	61,182 Microsoft employees, first half of 2020; natural experiment	Firm-wide remote work made collaboration networks more static and siloed; more asynchronous communication	One firm; early pandemic; authors employed by Microsoft

Study	Context and design	Main reported finding	Key limitation
Aksoy et al. (2022)	Survey of full-time workers in 27 countries, 2021 to early 2022	Average 1.5 WFH days per week; employers planned 0.7, workers wanted 1.7; option valued at about 5% of pay	Online self-reported survey; educated respondents
Barrero et al. (2023)	U.S. Survey of Working Arrangements and Attitudes	28% of paid workdays worked at home in mid-2023, about four times the 2019 rate	Survey-based; self-reported

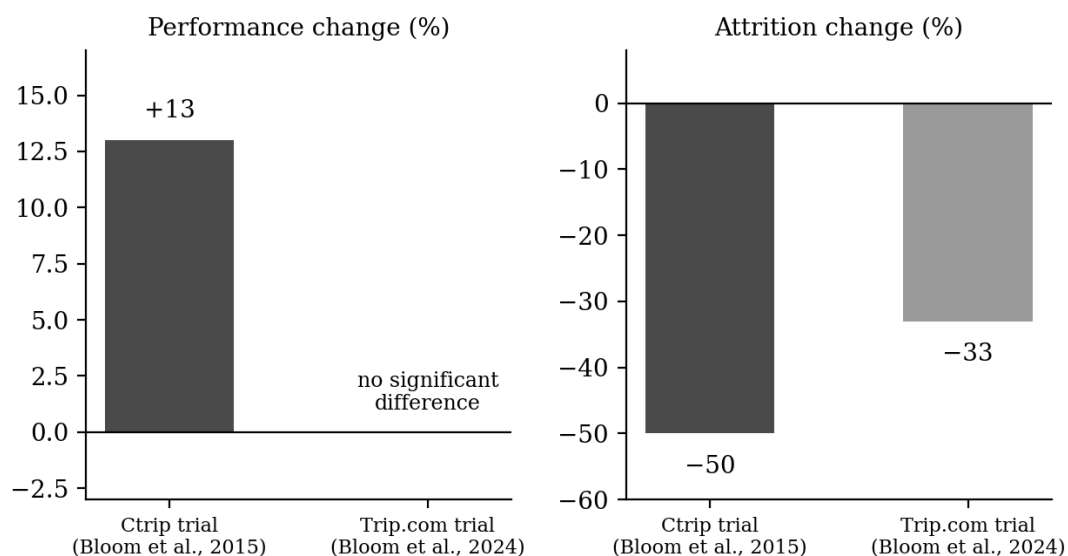
Note. Summaries are of the findings reported in the cited works and are simplified. WFH = working from home.

Hybrid Evidence

More recent work asks about hybrid arrangements. Bloom et al. (2024) conducted a six-month randomized trial at Trip.com involving 1,612 employees, in which eligible employees worked from home two days a week. They found that hybrid working reduced attrition by 33 percent and did not damage performance or promotion outcomes. Attrition fell most among non-managers, women and those with long commutes. In their working paper version, they also found that managers were less likely to volunteer and that manager attrition did not fall (Bloom et al., 2022). The managers in the experiment revised their views of hybrid work's productivity effect from a perceived negative effect (−2.6 percent on average) before the experiment to a slightly positive one (+1.0 percent) afterwards.

Figure 2 sets the two experimental studies side by side. I should stress, again, that this is a comparison of two studies with different designs, different work and different outcome measures, so it should not be read as a trend.

Figure 2
Reported Effects in Two Randomized Trials of Remote and Hybrid Work



Note. Values from Bloom et al. (2015) and Bloom et al. (2024). The Trip.com trial found no significant performance difference, shown here as zero. The trials differ in design, task and outcome measures.

Self-Reported Productivity

A good deal of the evidence used in public discussion is self-reported. Aksoy et al. (2022), in a survey of full-time workers in 27 countries, found that most employees were favorably surprised by their productivity when working from home. Barrero et al. (2021) similarly reported that workers' perceptions of working from home improved after the pandemic began. These are useful because they show what workers believe, and beliefs drive decisions about where to live and whether to quit. But self-assessment of productivity is not the same as measured output, and people who prefer working

from home may rate it more generously. I treat these surveys as evidence of preferences and perceptions and as weaker evidence of actual productivity.

Longer-Run and Organizational Effects

The harder question is what happens to learning, mentoring and innovation. Emanuel et al. (2023) examined software engineers and, as I understand their study, found that proximity to coworkers affects the feedback that people receive, with early-career engineers particularly affected. I would want to check the details before relying on more than that general claim. This is consistent with the promotion penalties in Bloom et al. (2015) and Emanuel and Harrington (2024). At the same time, Bloom et al. (2024) found no promotion penalty under a two-day hybrid arrangement. A plausible reading is that the *intensity* of remote work matters, with full-time remote work carrying more risk to career development than a partial arrangement, but I present that as a hypothesis, not an established fact.

Employee Motivation and Well-Being

Motivation research on remote work follows the autonomy story. Gajendran and Harrison (2007) found that perceived autonomy was one of the main pathways through which telecommuting was associated with better attitudes. Golden and Veiga (2005) found that the relationship between the extent of telecommuting and job satisfaction was curvilinear, with satisfaction rising and then levelling off, which is an important reminder that "more" is not always better. In the Ctrip and Trip.com experiments, remote and hybrid workers also reported higher satisfaction (Bloom et al., 2015, 2024).

But the same body of work highlights costs. Golden et al. (2008) studied professional isolation among teleworkers and found that it was associated with lower job performance and higher turnover intentions. Wang et al. (2021) identified isolation and loneliness as key challenges. A rapid review by Oakman et al. (2020) of mental and physical health effects of working at home concluded that the evidence was mixed and depended heavily on the organizational context, including management support and how remote work was introduced. That final point seems important to me. Much pandemic-era research measured people forced to work from home, often with children at home and schools closed, and this is a very different situation from a voluntary, well-supported arrangement.

There is also a gender dimension. Chung and van der Lippe (2020) argued in an introduction to a special issue that flexible working can support work-life balance but does not automatically produce gender equality and can reinforce existing gender divisions of unpaid work. Aksoy et al. (2022) found that employees valued the option of working from home two to three days a week at about 5 percent of pay, on average, and valued it more if they were women, had children or had longer commutes. Those results suggest that the benefits are unevenly distributed and that the option is valued precisely where constraints are heaviest.

Finally, Kniffin et al. (2021), in a broad review for the *American Psychologist*, discussed how the pandemic affected many aspects of work, including motivation, well-being and leadership. It is a helpful synthesis, but a good part of it is agenda-setting and not empirical, and I would treat its claims accordingly.

Work-Life Boundaries

Remote work is often sold as a way to improve work-life balance, and to some extent it does. But it also removes the physical markers that separate the two. Boundary theory predicts that people who prefer segmentation will find it harder when work happens at home (Ashforth et al., 2000; Clark, 2000). Kossek et al. (2006) argued that the degree of control that people have over their work and their boundaries, and not just whether they telecommute, is what shapes work-family outcomes. I find this

convincing as a general principle: the same home-based arrangement can be liberating for someone with control and stressful for someone without.

Working hours are part of this. Kelliher and Anderson (2010) found that employees working flexibly reported greater work intensification, and that some interpreted this as reciprocating the flexibility they had been given. In the Trip.com working paper, Bloom et al. (2022) reported that hybrid reduced working hours on home days and increased them on office days and weekends, which changes the structure of the working week without necessarily reducing total effort. This is one working paper on one firm, so I do not want to over-read it. But it suggests that when we look at "work-life balance" we should look at the shape of the week and not only at the number of remote days.

Commuting is a large part of the story, too. Aksoy et al. (2022) found higher valuations of working from home among people with longer commutes, and Bloom et al. (2024) found that hybrid working reduced attrition most among those with long commutes. The time saved is a real benefit, but it is also a resource that can be absorbed back into work, into caring, or into leisure. Which of these happens seems to depend on the person and on the organization's norms, and I think it is an underexplored area.

Management Practices

If remote work changes anything for managers, it is the ability to *see* work. Traditional management often relies on physical presence as a proxy for effort. Remote and hybrid arrangements weaken that proxy and push managers toward measuring outputs, setting clear goals and trusting employees. Kossek et al. (2006) and Wang et al. (2021) both discuss how monitoring and control are more difficult in remote settings, and how autonomy-supportive management helps.

Managers are not neutral observers in this. Bloom et al. (2024) reported that managers in their experiment initially expected hybrid work to reduce productivity, but that their views shifted after seeing it, and their working paper found that managers were less likely to volunteer for the trial than non-managers (Bloom et al., 2022). To me this is one of the more interesting findings in the literature. It suggests that some of the resistance to remote work among managers may reflect expectations and the burden of adapting, and not only evidence on performance. I should be careful: it is a single study, and managers' reluctance can have many causes, including legitimate concerns about coordination and mentoring.

There is also the question of fairness in evaluation. The promotion patterns in Bloom et al. (2015) and in Emanuel and Harrington (2024) point to a risk that remote workers are disadvantaged in career progression, either because they contribute differently or because they are less visible. The studies do not by themselves tell us which. For organizations, the practical implication seems to be that performance evaluation criteria need to be explicit, and that mixed hybrid schedules should be designed so that teams overlap on some days. That last suggestion is my own, and it is supported only indirectly by the coordination research discussed below.

Barrero et al. (2023) note that ongoing adaptation of managerial practices is one reason they expect remote work to persist. This fits the idea that management is learning by doing: firms that started with crude policies (or with coercive ones) are gradually developing routines for hiring, onboarding, appraisal and team coordination that work with distributed staff. Whether those routines are adequate is not something I could find well-tested evidence for, and I flag that as a gap.

Digital Collaboration

Digital tools made large-scale remote work possible, but they are not neutral. The most careful large-scale study I know of is Yang et al. (2022), who used data on emails, calendars, instant messages, calls and hours from 61,182 Microsoft employees in the first half of 2020. They found that firm-wide remote work caused the collaboration network of workers to become more static and siloed, with fewer

bridges between different parts of the network, and that communication shifted to more asynchronous media. A summary of the work reported that workers spent about a quarter less time collaborating across groups than before the pandemic (University of California, Berkeley, 2021). I should note that the study reports on one firm during the early months of the pandemic, that all workers were remote at once, and that several authors were employed by Microsoft, which the paper discloses. The result is nonetheless important because it suggests a specific mechanism: remote work may not damage collaboration *within* teams very much, but it can reduce the weak-tie contacts that bring in new information.

That fits older research on distributed teams. Cramton (2001) and Hinds and Bailey (2003) describe how dispersed teams lose contextual information and can misattribute problems to individuals, and Maznevski and Chudoba (2000) emphasized rhythms of communication and occasional face-to-face meetings. I would not go so far as to say the pandemic evidence confirms these ideas, since the earlier work concerned teams designed to be dispersed, but the parallels are suggestive.

A newer concern is fatigue from video meetings. Bailenson (2021) offered a *theoretical* argument about causes of "Zoom fatigue," such as prolonged eye contact, self-view and reduced mobility, and Fauville et al. (2021) developed a scale to measure it. These are interesting contributions, but I would be wary of treating fatigue as a settled empirical fact about all video meetings. What is more secure is the general point that technology mediates collaboration in ways that are not always better or worse, only different. The Trip.com working paper found that hybrid work increased messaging and video calls, even when all employees were in the office (Bloom et al., 2022), which suggests that digital communication may become a permanent feature even where people are co-located.

It seems sensible, then, to think of digital collaboration less as a substitute for the office and more as a new layer with its own strengths and failure modes: easier to schedule, easier to record, but weaker on serendipity, ambiguity and relationship building. That is, in the language of media richness theory, a mismatch problem more than a technology problem (Daft & Lengel, 1986).

Organizational Culture

Culture is, for many executives, the main reason for wanting people back in the office. Schein (2010) defines organizational culture in terms of shared assumptions that a group has learned as it solved problems, and emphasizes that these assumptions are transmitted to new members. If that is right, then anything that changes how new members interact with established ones, such as remote onboarding, could affect how culture is transmitted. This is a logical argument and I should be clear that it is not, in itself, empirical evidence.

The empirical evidence on culture and remote work is thin, in my reading. Most of the rigorous studies measure productivity, attrition or communication patterns and not culture itself. What we can say is that some proxies for culture-relevant processes are affected: informal feedback and learning (Emanuel et al., 2023), cross-group collaboration (Yang et al., 2022), and career progression (Bloom et al., 2015; Emanuel & Harrington, 2024). Psychological safety, the shared belief that a team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking (Edmondson, 1999), is another culture-related concept that could plausibly be affected by remote work, since cues for trust and support are different online. I did not find strong causal evidence on this for the post-pandemic period, so I leave it as a question for research.

There is also a counter-argument. Culture may be as much about what leaders do and reward as about where people sit. Kniffin et al. (2021) discuss how leadership and organizational practices shaped experiences during the pandemic. An organization with a strong culture of trust might adapt more easily to remote work than one whose culture relies on presence and visibility. Of course, that too is a hypothesis. My own reading is that culture is probably better understood as a moderator of remote work's effects than only as an outcome, but I do not have a study that tests this directly.

Inequality and Access

The benefits of remote work are not evenly available. Dingel and Neiman (2020) found that the share of jobs that can be done at home varies across occupations, and that it is lower in lower-income countries. Mongey et al. (2021) showed, for the United States, that workers in occupations with less capacity to work from home or with high physical proximity requirements tended to have lower earnings and be more vulnerable to the pandemic's economic effects. Sostero et al. (2020), in a European Commission report, examined "teleworkability" and raised the possibility of a new digital divide, in which those who can telework are protected in a crisis and those who cannot are exposed.

Within the group that *can* work remotely, there are further inequalities. Access to a quiet room, reliable internet and a suitable workspace differs, and so do caring responsibilities. Chung and van der Lippe (2020) warn that flexible working can reinforce gender inequality if caring duties continue to fall mostly on women. Aksoy et al. (2022) found that women and people with children valued remote work more, which is consistent with both a benefit and a constraint. Career penalties for remote workers (Bloom et al., 2015; Emanuel & Harrington, 2024), if they generalize, would also interact with these patterns, since the groups who most want remote work may be the groups most exposed to those penalties. I want to be careful, because these studies are not designed to test that interaction, and I am drawing an inference.

Selection also matters for interpretation. Emanuel and Harrington (2024) found that workers who chose remote jobs were on average less productive than those who chose on-site jobs in their setting. That does not mean remote workers are less capable in general, since the result is specific to one firm and job type, but it does mean that comparing remote and on-site workers without addressing selection is risky. The opposite selection can occur elsewhere, and the sign of selection probably depends on the labor market.

Hybrid Work

Hybrid work, with some days at home and some in the office, is now the modal arrangement for many knowledge workers. Aksoy et al. (2022) reported that, in their 27-country survey, employers planned about 0.7 days per week of working from home after the pandemic, while workers wanted about 1.7 days. That gap indicates a potential source of friction. If employers offer less than workers want, retention problems or informal non-compliance could arise, and the retention results from Bloom et al. (2024) suggest that the costs of attrition can be substantial. Attrition, in the Trip.com study, was estimated to be costly, though the exact cost figures are not something I rely on here.

The research suggests that the *design* of a hybrid arrangement matters. Gajendran and Harrison (2007) found that adverse effects on coworker relationships appeared mostly at higher intensities of telecommuting. Golden and Veiga (2005) found a curvilinear relationship with satisfaction. Bloom et al. (2024) tested a specific design, two days at home per week, and found no harm to performance or promotion. This does not mean that three or four days would have the same effect, or that other kinds of firms would see the same results, and I want to avoid generalizing from one experiment. It does mean that the hybrid model should not be equated with the fully remote model when discussing risks.

Table 1 summarizes potential advantages and disadvantages of remote, hybrid and traditional models. It is a synthesis prepared from the sources discussed in this article, so the entries should be read as *potential* effects, contingent on context, and not as findings that hold for every organization.

Table 1
Potential Advantages and Disadvantages of Traditional, Hybrid and Fully Remote Work Models

Model	Potential advantages	Potential disadvantages
Traditional (fully on-site)	Easy informal contact, feedback and mentoring (Emanuel et al., 2023); established supervision and appraisal routines; physical separation of work and home (Ashforth et al., 2000); more cross-group contact than in a fully remote firm (Yang et al., 2022).	Commuting time and cost; less flexibility, with possible retention costs (Bloom et al., 2015, 2024); harder for caregivers and long-distance commuters; noisy or interrupted work in some settings (Bloom et al., 2015).
Hybrid	Lower attrition and higher satisfaction in one large trial without harm to performance or promotion (Bloom et al., 2024); some in-person contact retained; matches many workers' stated preferences (Aksoy et al., 2022).	Scheduling and coordination problems (author's inference, not directly measured in the cited studies); possible longer office-day and weekend hours (Bloom et al., 2022); manager reluctance (Bloom et al., 2022); risk of unequal visibility between office and home days (author's inference).
Fully remote	Autonomy and flexibility (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007); output gains in some routine tasks (Bloom et al., 2015); wider geographic choice for workers and employers (Choudhury et al., 2021); no commute.	Professional isolation (Golden et al., 2008); more siloed collaboration networks (Yang et al., 2022); possible weaker training and promotion (Bloom et al., 2015; Emanuel & Harrington, 2024); blurred boundaries (Kossek et al., 2006); unequal access to remote-capable jobs (Dingel & Neiman, 2020).

Note. Prepared by the author as a synthesis of the sources cited in this article. Entries are potential effects that depend on context, not findings that apply to every organization.

The table shows, I think, why hybrid is attractive: it keeps some of the retention and flexibility benefits while limiting some of the coordination and career risks. But it also brings its own problem, coordination of schedules, which I flag as a risk rather than something the cited studies measure directly.

International Evidence

Most of the strongest studies come from the United States and China, and it would be a mistake to treat them as representative of the world. Aksoy et al. (2022) provide the broadest comparison, a survey of full-time workers in 27 countries who had finished primary school, conducted in 2021 and early 2022. They found that working from home averaged 1.5 days per week in their sample, ranging widely across countries. Since the sample is of people who could be reached through an online survey, it likely over-represents relatively educated, connected workers. This limits generalization to the wider workforce.

Institutional publications supplement these findings. The OECD (2021) reviewed trends and prospects for teleworking during the pandemic across member countries and discussed policy questions arising from it. Eurofound (2020) reported on living, working and the COVID-19 pandemic in the European Union, including changes in working arrangements and their effects on working conditions. I use both here as sources of general context, and I do not draw specific figures from them. Readers who need country-level numbers should consult those publications directly, since figures differ by survey and time.

In lower-income settings, the situation is different. Hatayama et al. (2020), in a World Bank working paper using skills surveys for 53 countries, examined how amenable jobs are to working from home and found that this varies with country income level. Saltiel (2020) studied who can work from home in developing countries and likewise found limited capacity, with the feasibility linked to education and job characteristics as well as to access to computers and the internet. Together with Dingel and Neiman (2020), this suggests that the remote work story is, in much of the world, a story

about a relatively small and advantaged part of the workforce, and that concerns about infrastructure and digital access are more central there.

Cultural and institutional context is also plausible as a factor, for example in attitudes to hierarchy and presence, labor regulation and housing conditions. However, I did not find rigorous cross-country evidence that isolates such differences, so I raise it only as a question. Trials in China, such as those of Bloom et al. (2015, 2024), are valuable partly because they show that results from Western contexts are not the only ones available, but two studies from one country do not allow strong claims about "Chinese" or "Asian" patterns.

The Future of Work

Predicting the future of work is risky, and I want to be modest here. What the evidence in this article suggests is a few tentative directions. Barrero et al. (2021) projected, on the basis of their survey data, that about 20 percent of full workdays would be supplied from home after the pandemic, compared with about 5 percent before, and the mid-2023 figure of 28 percent (Barrero et al., 2023) was above that projection. This suggests that working from home has been more durable than many expected, though it also suggests that surveys can be revised as circumstances change.

Three developments seem worth watching, and I list them as areas for empirical follow-up, not as forecasts. First, management learning: as managers gain experience, the gap between expectations and evidence may narrow, as it did among the managers in Bloom et al. (2024). Second, the relationship between remote work and career development, particularly for early-career workers, where the evidence so far suggests some risk (Emanuel et al., 2023; Emanuel & Harrington, 2024). Third, the role of technology: Barrero et al. (2023) expect further improvements in tools and products supporting remote work to reinforce its persistence. I have deliberately not discussed emerging technologies such as generative artificial intelligence in detail, because the evidence base is moving quickly and I could not verify a stable set of findings to cite.

Regulation and organizational policy are also likely to matter, for instance on the right to disconnect, on employer obligations for home workspaces and on working-time rules. These are areas where the legal situation varies across jurisdictions and changes over time, so readers should check current government and institutional sources instead of relying on this article.

Limitations

There are limitations that readers should keep in mind. First, this is a narrative review and not a systematic one, so my selection of studies may be biased toward well-known and English-language work. Second, many of the studies I rely on are from a few firms and countries, and several are working papers or conference drafts before they appeared in journals, so details may have changed. Third, I could not independently verify some details reported in the abstracts of a few studies, and I have tried to avoid citing specific numbers where I could not confirm them. Fourth, the field is moving fast, and new evidence on hybrid work, generative AI and return-to-office policies has likely appeared since I wrote this. Fifth, as a student writing without access to the full text of every paper, I sometimes relied on abstracts and official summaries, which is a real limitation, and I recommend that the key claims in this article be checked against the original papers before they are used in a thesis or publication.

Conclusion

The question I started with was whether remote work is good or bad for organizations. My answer, after reading the literature, is that this is not really the right question. The evidence suggests that remote work can raise output in some settings (Bloom et al., 2015), lower it in others (Emanuel & Harrington, 2024; Gibbs et al., 2023), and that hybrid arrangements may reduce attrition without visible harm to

performance in at least one large trial (Bloom et al., 2024). Collaboration networks can become more siloed when a whole firm goes remote (Yang et al., 2022), and career development may suffer for those who are remote full-time, although the evidence is not conclusive. Well-being depends on autonomy, boundaries and support, and not simply on where people sit (Oakman et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2021).

Three points seem to me most important. First, the *intensity* and *design* of remote work matter more than the label, and hybrid arrangements deserve to be studied on their own terms. Second, management practices, including evaluation, trust and scheduling, look like the main levers that organizations control. Third, access is unequal: the benefits accrue mainly to a specific segment of the workforce in specific countries (Dingel & Neiman, 2020; Saltiel, 2020), and organizations and policymakers need to keep that in view.

I would also say that we should be careful about certainty in either direction. The evidence is growing but still limited in scope, and many of the claims made in public debate, on both sides, go beyond what the studies show. In the end, the most defensible position is probably a conditional one: remote and hybrid work can work well, for some tasks, some people and some organizations, when they are designed and managed with care.

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