



Remote Work Paradox: Examining the Tension between Workplace Flexibility, Employee Productivity and Organisational Performance

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Abstract: *The rapid expansion of remote work has transformed conventional employment arrangements, offering employees greater flexibility while simultaneously generating complex challenges for productivity and organisational performance. This study examines the remote work paradox, focusing on the tension between workplace flexibility, employee productivity and organisational performance. The study is premised on the argument that although remote work provides employees with greater autonomy, reduced commuting demands and improved opportunities for work-life integration, these benefits may coexist with challenges relating to work intensification, blurred work-life boundaries, social isolation, communication difficulties, employee monitoring and weakened organisational cohesion. The study adopts a qualitative research approach based exclusively on secondary data obtained from relevant peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, institutional reports and credible industry publications on remote work and organisational behaviour. The data were subjected to thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and perspectives concerning the relationship between remote work flexibility, employee productivity and organisational outcomes. The analysis reveals that the productivity implications of remote work are not universally positive or negative but are shaped by organisational culture, job characteristics, technological infrastructure, managerial practices, employee autonomy and the nature of collaboration required. While flexibility can enhance employee satisfaction, motivation and individual productivity, excessive autonomy, digital fatigue, isolation and inadequate organisational support may undermine collaboration, innovation and long-term organisational performance. The study concludes that the remote work paradox lies in the coexistence of flexibility and control, autonomy and accountability, as well as individual productivity and collective organisational effectiveness. It recommends that organisations adopt hybrid and context-sensitive remote work policies, strengthen digital communication systems, establish clear performance expectations and prioritise employee well-being to maximise the benefits of remote work while mitigating its unintended consequences.*

Keywords: Remote Work; Remote Work Paradox; Workplace Flexibility; Employee Productivity; Organisational Performance

I. Introduction

For a very long time, people had physical jobs. Universities and other higher institutions of learning trained individuals to get certificates. Everyone wanted to sit behind desks with a desktop before them in an air-conditioned room. People believed so much in labour and physical exertion of energy. Not too many people ever believed that a time would come when most people would want to work from home. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this trend almost overnight, forcing organisations to scale home-based operations and adapt management practices (Kurfi et al., 2021). The invasion of the earth by COVI-19 was a game changer (Maradun & Aondover, 2025). It hit the world by storm and kept the world at a

standstill. Before long, it became pertinent for individuals to seek digital skills. Over the past decade, digital technologies and shifting workforce expectations have precipitated a massive wave of remote work. By 2024, an estimated 30% of global knowledge employees will work predominantly from home or satellite offices, up from less than 10% in 2019 (Aondover & Phillips, 2020; Usman et al., 2022; Ijriss, 2025).

The concept of remote work, once viewed as 'not real work', underwent a massive evolutionary shift following the COVID-19 pandemic (Ahmed & Msughter, 2022; Aliough et al., 2023). As organizations transition from emergency pandemic measures to permanent 'remote-first' or hybrid models, a stark paradox has emerged: the very segment of the workforce that feels most connected to their mission often feels the most distressed in their personal lives (Airaoje et al., 2024). The truth is that physical labour and onsite jobs didn't actually have some benefits like control of one's space and to a large degree, time. However, we shouldn't ignore the fact that remote work kills social life and reduces the team spirit in the people who take on such tasks. From this we can begin to infer that with every blessing of digital advancement comes a curse as an extra package. With the advent of digital skills and remote job offers comes a lot of downsides that can range from poor concentration to anxiety and depression.

The issue is that many organizations assumed that remote jobs automatically led to better wellbeing (Vitalis et al., 2025). While it led to higher productivity (to a large extent), it had no direct link to higher welfare. In fact, it was as if higher engagement in Working from Home actually diminished wellbeing to a large extent. The reality became much more glaring when many people who had these jobs began to report that they were depressed and gained weight more than many other onsite workers. This isn't a coincidence. However, the impact of WFH (on employee well-being exhibits a double-edged sword characteristic: On one hand, it positively influences mental health and job satisfaction through factors like reduced commuting time, improved work-life balance, and enhanced personal self-efficacy. On the other hand, prolonged WFH may lead to social isolation, blurred professional boundaries, and conflicts between family and work roles, which can undermine employees' sense of belonging and team collaboration spirit, thereby negatively affecting their well-being (Dong et al., 2025).

Well-being is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as the state of being comfortable, healthy, or happy (Oxford Languages, n.d.). However, it is important to realise that well-being is a much broader concept than moment-to-moment happiness. While it does include happiness, it also includes other things, such as how satisfied people are with their life as a whole, their sense of purpose, and how in control they feel. In this respect, the New Economics Foundation describes well-being as the following: Well-being can be understood as how people feel and how they function, both on a personal and a social level, and how they evaluate their lives as a whole. Wellbeing therefore goes beyond making money or having lots of clients. It goes beyond occasional smiles and productivity but extends also to social connection and mental stability.

The question now is why remote workers record high engagement and work productivity but a relatively lower level of wellbeing, and how does this affect the general output of the organisation? Looking at this question closely, we are led to believe that not only do we need to seek more understanding of this paradox, we also need to get as much backing as possible with available information made from previous research. This paper argues that the remote paradox stems from social isolation, blurred boundaries and autonomy-induced stress, requiring hybrid solutions for sustainable performance. The point is that many

things can go wrong when people with lots of digital skills continually experience burnout and a heightened stress level that puts their health at risk.

II. Research Method

2.1 The Remote Work Paradox

The Paradox refers to a contradictory situation. Remote work offers clear benefits yet it simultaneously produces negative effects on wellbeing. While there is an increase in flexibility and autonomy, there is the danger of loneliness, overwork and stress. The paradox is that the very features that make remote work appealing also create the conditions for harm. The paradox between worker engagement and wellbeing lies in the finding that while fully remote workers are often the most engaged segment of the workforce, they frequently report the lowest levels of overall wellbeing or thriving compared to their hybrid or on-site peers. While an individual has the freedom to choose his schedule, that freedom makes it hard to ever 'clock out'. He can save 2 hours of transport but those hours get absorbed into extra work emails that can make a wreck after the day's journey. The list is unending. Social isolation can predispose the remote worker to loneliness and disengagement. He can get his work done but as a human, he needs connection. Remote work removes the incidental social fabric, and video calls don't fully replace it.

Working from home blurs the boundaries between work and family domains, intensifying family-work conflict. This conflict negatively impacts employees' physical and mental health, job satisfaction, and life satisfaction, ultimately leading to job burnout and a diminished sense of well-being. The line between work life and home life gets blurred out in such a way that if the remote worker isn't careful, he exposes himself to the danger of increased cognitive load and reduced recovery time (Airaoje et al., 2023). With the absence of transport and a separate office, there is a tendency for the worker to feel stuck throughout the day with all tasks getting into different aspects of his life. These heightened job demands consume employees' time and energy, making it difficult for them to manage their family responsibilities effectively. At the same time, role ambiguity blurs the lines between work and family life. Employees may find themselves handling household tasks during work hours or addressing work responsibilities during family time, leading to poor time allocation and strained family relationships (Dong et al., 2025c). Autonomy is always seen as positive. However, too much autonomy without clear structure or support becomes exhausting.

The remote work paradox is evident in three mechanisms as pointed out already. First, social isolation erodes belonging and increases loneliness. Second, boundaries prevent psychological detachment from work. Third, autonomy boundaries prevent psychological detachment from work. Third, autonomy, while desirable, induces stress when unaccompanied by structure. Hybrid solutions mitigate all three pathways, thereby enabling sustainable performance. The truth is that capacity without wellbeing isn't sustainable.

2.2 The Context

Remote work accelerated the demand for remote jobs because of the lockdown. Remote work refers to any work that is performed outside of the company's own dedicated office space, in a location of the workers choosing. Remote work can be done in a co-working space, at home, at a cafe—the list goes on. As long as your work can be performed without

the need for in-person collaboration, remote work is usually an option—whether that’s in-house at a company, or as an independent freelancer (Hannah, 2023).

Affairs (2026) defined it as an arrangement in which employees perform their job duties from outside the traditional office environment. This setup relies on digital communication tools like email, video conferencing, and cloud services to facilitate tasks and collaboration (Airaoje et al., 2024). Telework, often used interchangeably with remote work, specifically refers to the practice of working from a location other than the office, typically from home or a remote location, and is an established concept that emphasizes flexibility and autonomy.

According to the writing by Pendell (2025) , while fully remote workers had the highest engagement (31%) due to greater autonomy, they also reported lower overall thriving (36%) compared to hybrid and on- site remote-capable workers (42%). He added that fully remote employees experienced more anger, sadness, loneliness and stress (45%) than most on-site workers, though their stress level was similar to hybrid workers (46%). He concluded that these patterns held true regardless of income, and that fully remote working is generally more mentally and emotionally taxing than hybrid or on-site arrangements.

2.3 The Engagement side of the Paradox

Over the years, many youngsters have developed interest in remote work. Youths love the idea of staying indoors working on their laptops, producing results and making money. This isn’t a coincidence— it is proof that more and more benefits seem to be attributed to this system. One reason for this is the level of engagement. Distraction level is dependent on the discipline level of the remote workers. As long as the employee concentrates, he can be sure that he’d produce as many results as possible. It allows for deep work as much as possible because there are no distractions around. Autonomy is a major factor in the engagement of remote workers. It allows for flexibility and independent decision making. In fact, autonomy is the major driver of engagement.

The availability of flexibility is a great reason for remote work to be encouraged among youngsters. Time and other resources can be adjusted to fit into one’s personal needs and productivity peaks. Work can be planned to fit into one’s specific situation or environmental peculiarities. In this sense, remote work reduces mental tension and allows for higher brain power in executing work. He can schedule as he wills and plan as he sees fit. This is a real advantage if utilized appropriately.

Concentration is also a feature that cannot be sidelined because of its impact on productivity. There is reduced workplace distractions compared to an office environments. Circumstances like side talks, background chatting or noise, incessant interruption, meeting overloads and many more are eliminated.

III. Result and Discussion

3.1 Remote Work Psychological Frameworks

The autonomy of remote workers has a way of giving them a positive edge especially when it comes to reaching flow rate easily (Pendell, 2025). This is the primary driver of the 31% engagement rate among remote workers. Paradoxically, too much autonomy creates increased cognitive load, making it exhausting and almost hateful. 45% stress level has been reported to have been as a result of the mental burden that comes with too much independence.

The social proximity and mental distance framework gives an idea of what independence can lead to. Freedom can become a curse when it prevents social interactions and efficient camaraderie. Remote workers have and maintain little or no connection with other employees because they have their own spaces. There're no real relationships, just online ones. This isn't a good feature of a fulfilled life. Pendell (2025) affirms that in the absence of social support, workers are predisposed to loneliness (27%), sadness (30%) and anger (35%). No amount of digital communication seems to be able to cater for the mental wellbeing of these individuals. The solution still lies in having real world relationships.

The work-life boundary framework reveals that the absence of the need to commute has a way of increasing stress level and burnout since there might not even be a distinction between work and day-to-day activities. Too much will be done because there are no boundaries. The line between work and life has been blurred. If the worker only cares about results, there is a higher temptation to neglect so many aspects of his life and just focus on working, since he doesn't need to commute anyway. He eventually overworks and suffers severe burnout. Engaging the digital space consistently also makes him prone to digital burnout. His constant use of zoom and other online platforms may lead to exhaustion as there won't be a variety of experience that comes with on-site work.

The activities and ease of work of a remote worker is highly dependent on the personality-environment framework (Aondover et al., 2022). While some individuals see no problem sitting at home and working for hours, others get agitated staying all alone in a particular place. The introvert thrives in silence. The extrovert, however, isn't fulfilled in a lonely space because he feeds off the energy of others. He must interact. He must relate. This in itself can be a burden mentally, leading to more complications. This implies that the person matters. The kind of person the remote worker is actually a big factor in how productive he would be if he engaged fully in online jobs.

Lack of concentration has an immediate experience and the long-term outcome. The immediate experience is what happens when the person is able to perform deep work while long-term outcome talks about what happens to the worker when he doesn't have to deal with disturbances and distractions. Deep work is only done in the absence of distraction and this is proof that cognitive ability is highly dependent on environmental luggage. The removal of distractions makes the brain stop task-switching and this triggers a plethora of cognitive upgrades. The worker's memory doesn't get clogged by notifications and pings, especially if he learns early to turn off sound notifications. He chooses what gets his attention and helps his delivery. Some problems can only be solved in a serene environment. Sometimes, no amount of trial will convince an idea to come in a distraction-ridden environment. Removal of distraction allows for deeper pattern recognition which makes it easy for him to notice subtle patterns and connections which would have been missed otherwise.

The quality of results actually improves in a remote work environment. The work produced is structurally sounder. Fewer typos, fewer logical gaps and more elegant solutions because the worker has the mental space to review their work as they do it, rather than fixing it later. This advantage makes it also easier for many to believe that remote workers have it all figured out. If there is anything that's high on the ladder for a remote worker, it is the resource of time. Time is actually the "friend" of a remote worker. He literally can "manage" his time. The time of commuting is eliminated, he can take more rest and recover from stress faster. His time is much more compatible with his work compared to a typical office worker.

3.2 The Wellbeing Side of the Paradox

Every light source generates a shadow. This means that with every upside, there is a downside. The autonomy, lack of distraction, flexibility and other merits of remote work do not cancel out its demerits automatically. Previous findings have revealed that remote workers experience lowest thriving and highest stress levels irrespective of results produced (Hile et al., 2022).

For example, the total lack of distraction, especially if prolonged for days, creates serious problems if overlooked. Sometimes, distractions can be "helpful" since they create a sense of belonging in a community. Total lack of distraction can signify isolation if not gotten at optimal level. Another issue with lack of distraction is that the worker gets locked into a single mental model. If they are heading down the wrong path, they will build a magnificent, complex solution to the "wrong problem" with incredible speed, wasting a massive amount of time. Distractions act as cognitive resets at times. They force one to reevaluate one's approach. With no distractions, the worker often forgets to blink, drink water, eat lunch or shift their posture. This leads to severe eye strain, back pain and a sudden energy crash the moment they stop. It could also mean a lack of spontaneous human interaction.

The worker may feel isolated, undervalued and disconnected from the company's broader mission. They become a "machine", which rarely leads to long-term job satisfaction. No distraction ultimately would mean no accidental learning because many great business ideas come from overhearing a colleague's problem in the hallway or seeing a random email about a new tool. The point is that lack of distraction does not automatically make a worker "better". It makes them extremely efficient at a single task, but dangerously brittle. The ideal state for a worker is not zero distractions, but controlled scheduled distractions. That gives them the superpowers without the tunnel vision and physical crash.

The absence of fixed structure and physical monitoring make it difficult to manage the boundaries between work and life. Family gets into work and work find its way into family. The mix leads to heightened stress and burnout. There is no "end of the day" signal and there is nothing like a different space at times. This can mean that many things will go unnoticed since so much seem to be coming up all at once. Autonomy can be a curse when it comes to wellbeing. Engagement increases, productivity rises but mental load increases too. Autonomy places so much weight on the shoulders of the remote worker because he has to be the one to make decisions and live with the outcomes of those decisions. Cognitive load, uncertainty and stress plague remote workers for long periods of time.

The lack of direct access to office equipment can also be frustrating. Meeting lags and poor network, especially in the Nigerian setting can be exhausting also. There is also the problem of not getting immediate help from colleagues. All these make the very thing that looks beautiful also look burdensome.

3.3 Theoretical Framework

Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model is a framework that explains how job demands and resources impact employee well-being, motivation, and performance in the workplace.

Simply, job strain occurs in a situation of overwhelming demand in the face of resource scarcity. Many of these demands and resources can arise directly from the workplace environment itself. To provide a simple framework for workplace practitioners to understand the complex relationship between the employee and the workplace. This model appears to be the best in explaining the dichotomy of blessing and burden of the remote work paradox. It reflects both the costs and benefits of taking up this career path. Remote work has always had its downsides. Every career has its downsides and upsides. This is what the JD-R is set to explain in this context.

The demand aspect of remote work appears to be multidimensional. Anything that happens to deplete energy, reduce motivation and enhance frustration is a demand and it is a cost that must be counted if remote work will be engaged maximally. Demand leads to burnout. The resources aspect defines that upsides. Everything that allows for increased productivity, better mental serenity and health falls under this category. It replenishes energy and motivation. This dichotomy can't be escaped in the remote work dynamics.

The processes of the JD-R model also should be discussed: Health impairment is a downside just as the motivational process is an upside. These two sides make remote work a basket of merits and demerits. It is a two-edged sword as it provides both demands and resources.

IV. Conclusion

4.1 Summary of Findings

1. Remote workers are most engaged but least thriving
2. Five mechanisms explain engagement: Autonomy, flexibility, concentration, time, self-efficacy.
3. Five mechanisms also explain wellbeing deficit: Isolation, loneliness, cognitive load, emotional strain, blurred boundaries.
4. Individual differences have the capacity to moderate outcomes and coping abilities.
5. Job descriptions should be as specific as they should be. Vagueness will lead to exhaustion.

4.2 The Salvation of Hybrid Models

Hybrid models actually are qualified to solve this problem. Hybrid models address this paradox by providing both resources (autonomy on remote days) and reducing demands (social connection on office days). A fine blend of these will go a long way to make work faster and of greater quality. There is a lot that can be achieved if this model was utilized as efficiently as possible.

It also reduces loneliness and emotional strain. Sharing meals and interacting sufficiently with colleagues is a great indicator of wellbeing. This implies that as remote workers work at home and gain the benefits of working from home, they also have the privilege of benefitting from physical interactions. This advantage not only improves the

quality of work produced in the long run but also ensures that the people who work together have what it takes to live good lives. Remote days preserve autonomy resources (flexibility, concentration, time savings) that boost engagement. On-site days provide social resources (team connection, collaboration, support) that boost wellbeing.

However, the implementation of hybrid models differs from company to company and that is why there are mixed data as regards the impact of hybrid models on engagement and wellbeing. According to Gallub (2025), hybrid workers record less engagement (23%) compared to remote work(31%) while Zoom (2025) observed that hybrid workers (35%) have much more engagement as opposed to the 33% of remote workers. We already know that this model actually helps to improve wellbeing but there will be distinctions in engagement level depending on the application.

Recommendations

1. Hybrid work should be encouraged. For example, 2-3 days every week on-site isn't too tedious. This helps the remote workers also have physical interactions balancing autonomy with social interactions
2. Clear boundaries should be adopted. There should be a clear cut difference between work time and leisure time. This reduces frustration and improves recovery period.
3. Wellbeing programs should be organised to enlighten remote workers of their need to prioritize their health.
4. Social interactions should be mandated. Events like team get-togethers and outings should be organized within the company.
5. All technological devices should be provided for the workers. There shouldn't be any reason for them to be stranded when it comes to the availability of necessary equipment.

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