



REMOTE WORK AS AN ORGANIZATIONAL AMPLIFIER: AN INTERNATIONAL QUALITATIVE STUDY OF CULTURE, LEADERSHIP, AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

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Abstract

Remote and hybrid work arrangements have fundamentally altered how organizations sustain culture, communication, and leadership in the post-pandemic era. This article presents a comprehensive synthesis of a master's thesis examining the impact of remote work on company culture through semi-structured interviews with 65 managers from international organizations across 13 countries. Using thematic analysis supported by MAXQDA 26, six primary themes were identified: remote work policies and support, cultural impact, benefits and challenges, productivity and engagement, leadership and communication, and the future of remote work. Findings reveal that remote work does not inherently strengthen or weaken organizational culture. Rather, it operates as a contextual arrangement that amplifies existing managerial practices, communication structures, and leadership behaviors. Organizations with strong communication systems, trust-based leadership, and clear performance expectations were able to maintain cohesion and engagement despite physical distance, whereas weak managerial systems resulted in fragmentation and reduced belonging. The study proposes an emergent framework in which national culture and organizational readiness condition remote work

¹ This article is derived from the master thesis "The Impact of Remote Work on Company Culture: An Interview-Based Analysis" by Sarah Farag.

adoption and its cultural outcomes. The study also identifies critical managerial implications, challenges and limitations, and future research directions, contributing to the growing body of literature on distributed work and organizational culture.

Keywords: Remote work, organizational culture, thematic analysis, leadership, hybrid work, employee engagement

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic catalyzed one of the most dramatic transformations in the modern history of work. Overnight, organizations across sectors were compelled to shift from traditional office-based structures to remote and hybrid arrangements, raising urgent questions about how organizational culture, employee engagement, and leadership effectiveness could be maintained across physical distance. While much early research focused on productivity metrics and technological enablement, comparatively less attention was devoted to the deeper cultural consequences of these structural shifts.

This article presents a substantially expanded and theoretically developed study derived from the authors' master's thesis, "The Impact of Remote Work on Company Culture: An Interview-Based Analysis," submitted to the Graduate School of Business at Istanbul Aydın University. It extends an earlier exploratory study published by the authors in this journal (Farag & Marşap, 2025), which examined 21 managerial interviews and reported preliminary thematic patterns. The present article is built on a substantially larger dataset of 65 semi-structured interviews spanning 13 countries and 15 industry sectors, analyzed using MAXQDA 26 thematic analysis software rather than manual coding. It develops a new explanatory framework remote work as an organizational amplifier, conditioned by national culture and organizational readiness that was not present in the earlier publication, and reports thematic findings, a discussion, and managerial implications that are new to this manuscript. None of the empirical findings, thematic data, or analytical conclusions reported here have appeared in any prior publication; the relationship between this article and the authors' earlier work is disclosed in full in the cover letter accompanying this submission.

Contemporary organizations operate in increasingly digitalized and globally dispersed environments. The concept of 'work,' once synonymous with physical presence in a shared space, has been fundamentally redefined. According to Gartner (as cited in Saleem & Khan, 2024), remote work refers to a flexible arrangement in which employees perform their tasks outside designated corporate offices. This structural shift challenges long-standing assumptions about how culture is built, communicated, and sustained. Schein and Schein (2016) define

organizational culture as a pattern of shared basic assumptions developed through collective learning; in distributed environments, the transmission of such assumptions requires entirely different mechanisms than those available in co-located settings.

Despite the proliferation of remote work studies, the field remains fragmented: research tends to focus on single variables such as productivity, well-being, or technology, rarely integrating the full complexity of cultural outcomes (Jacks, 2021). This study responds directly to that gap by employing qualitative, interview-based research across multiple sectors and national contexts to offer a nuanced, integrated understanding of how remote work reshapes the cultural fabric of organizations.

BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The Evolution of Remote Work

Telework predates the pandemic by half a century, though its early framing differed sharply from how the practice is understood today. Nilles (1975) coined the term 'telecommuting' in the context of urban planning, treating it as a logistical fix for commuting congestion rather than a question of organizational design. For decades the idea remained marginal: Bailey and Kurland (2002), reviewing the first generation of telework studies, found that its effects on job satisfaction, productivity, and isolation were inconsistent across firms, with no clear pattern emerging from the early evidence. Sardeshmukh, Sharma, and Golden (2012) later showed why this inconsistency persisted: autonomy could lower exhaustion in one organizational setting and raise disengagement in another, depending on factors the early literature rarely measured directly, such as managerial trust and job design. Donnelly and Johns (2021) trace this slow diffusion to the gradual maturation of ICT infrastructure, which expanded the technical feasibility of remote arrangements well before most organizations were willing to adopt them at scale.

What changed in 2020 was not the technology but the scale of forced adoption, and this is the detail the early telework literature could not anticipate. Within weeks, organizations that had resisted remote arrangements for years were operating almost entirely outside the office, and Hou and Sing's (2025) systematic review of post-pandemic workplace transformation finds that the organizations which adapted most successfully were not necessarily the most technologically advanced, but those that treated the shift as a structural and cultural problem rather than a purely logistical one. This distinction matters for the present study: it suggests that remote work's consequences were never uniform across organizations, but were instead refracted through whatever managerial and cultural conditions already existed before the transition. Neeley (2021) frames the organizations that navigated this period well as those

practicing deliberate cultural stewardship intentionally compensating for the loss of physical proximity rather than assuming culture would simply persist on its own.

Organizational Culture in Remote Environments

Schein and Schein's (2016) account of organizational culture as a system of shared assumptions, transmitted through collective experience, helps explain why remote work disrupts culture so unevenly. Their model identifies physical proximity, ritual, and direct observation as primary transmission mechanisms precisely the channels that distributed work removes. The question this raises is not whether remote work damages culture, but which transmission mechanisms an organization had relied on before the shift, and whether substitutes for those mechanisms were available.

Raghuram's (2021) framework narrows this further by identifying four specific dimensions most exposed to disruption informal communication, socialization, shared identity, and leadership visibility and recent empirical work largely converges on her conclusion. Bilderback and Kilpatrick (2024), Kato Nabirye (2025), and Zhou (2024), studying different organizational contexts, each report that remote work reconfigures rather than erases culture, but that the reconfiguration is rarely costless. The clearest illustration is what Thompson (2021) terms the 'watercooler effect': the loss of unplanned, low-stakes conversation that informally carries norms, gossip, and institutional knowledge between employees who might never otherwise interact. No deliberate communication policy fully substitutes for this, because its value lies precisely in being unplanned.

Eze et al. (2024) complicate the picture further by showing that organizations entering the transition with strong pre-existing values and high digital fluency suffered comparatively little cultural erosion a finding that sits uneasily with any account treating remote work as a uniform cause of cultural decline. Read together, these studies point toward a contingency interpretation rather than a deterministic one: remote work's cultural effect is not fixed but conditional on the leadership quality, communication infrastructure, and organizational readiness already present at the point of transition. This is the gap the present study addresses directly, not whether remote work helps or harms culture in the abstract, but what pre-existing conditions determine which outcome occurs.

Leadership and Communication in Distributed Teams

Of all the variables examined in the remote work literature, leadership behavior is the one most consistently linked to outcome variation across studies. Burns' (1978) and Bass's (1985) accounts of transformational leadership built on vision, intellectual stimulation, and

individualized attention to followers were developed for face-to-face contexts, and each of these mechanisms becomes harder to enact once it must pass through a screen. Prasad, Vaidya, and Anil Kumar (2023) operationalize this difficulty empirically: the leaders in their study who succeeded in remote settings did so specifically by substituting structured transparency, accessible feedback channels, and visibly equitable evaluation for the informal, observational forms of leadership that proximity used to make effortless.

Two further studies sharpen this point from opposite directions. Najem (2025) shows what happens in the absence of deliberate strategy: organizations whose leaders had no explicit plan for managing remote performance saw disengagement and cultural attachment decline together, suggesting the two are not independent outcomes but move in tandem. Blau's (1964) Social Exchange Theory supplies the mechanism connecting them trust, once embedded in how a leader manages, generates reciprocal commitment from employees, and Najem's organizations without such strategies were effectively failing to generate that reciprocity at all. Eubank (2025) adds a complicating nuance from the follower's side: both leaders and the people they managed valued the autonomy remote work afforded, even while acknowledging that communication quality and cultural maintenance had become harder to sustain autonomy and cohesion, in other words, do not automatically trade off against each other, but maintaining both demands active leadership work that proximity used to perform for free.

Digital mediation changes not just the volume of communication but its character. Yang et al.'s (2022) large-scale analysis of information workers found that remote arrangements strengthened communication within existing teams while weakening it across teams an effect that looks like increased cohesion locally but actually represents a narrowing of organizational connectivity overall. Aguillon and Cronin-Gilmore (2024) identify a related but distinct shift: remote communication tends to drift toward task content and away from relational content, gradually eroding the informal social fabric that task-focused exchanges were never designed to carry. Taken together, these findings suggest that the routines organizations build to replace lost informal contact scheduled meetings, defined information channels, deliberate feedback loops are not optional refinements but the primary mechanism through which any relational richness survives the shift to distance.

Employee Engagement, Well-Being, and Cultural Cohesion

Engagement research adds a further layer of conditionality to this picture. Fatima et al.'s (2024) systematic review finds that autonomy supports engagement only up to the point where isolation begins to outweigh its benefits past that threshold, engagement falls sharply unless an organization intervenes deliberately to counteract it. Marston (2022) reaches a compatible

conclusion from different data: engagement, satisfaction, and discretionary effort all moved together with how well an organization managed the remote transition itself, rather than with remote status as a fixed condition. The implication is that engagement outcomes say more about transition management than about remote work as such. Makridis and Schloetzer's (2024, 2025) large-sample evidence reinforces this by showing that engagement varies systematically by sector, occupation, and geography variation that would be hard to explain if remote work itself were the dominant causal factor, since the work arrangement was often similar across the cases that produced very different engagement results.

None of these well-being findings can be read as remote work having an intrinsic effect; in every case, the outcome is mediated by something else organizational support, household circumstances, individual self-regulation that the remote arrangement merely brings into sharper relief.

A pattern emerges from reading these four strands of literature together rather than separately. Across evolution, culture, leadership, and engagement research, the same structure repeats: remote work is rarely the variable that decides outcomes; it is the condition that makes whatever was already present in an organization its leadership habits, its communication discipline, its cultural strength visible and consequential in ways physical proximity used to obscure. The present study takes this recurring pattern as its starting hypothesis rather than its conclusion, and tests it directly against a substantially larger and more internationally distributed dataset than prior single-context studies have typically examined.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

The study was guided by a primary research question and four sub-questions:

Main Research Question (RQ1): How does remote work impact company culture, and what strategies can organizations implement to sustain a strong culture in remote or hybrid environments?

Sub-Question 1: How do different work models (fully remote and hybrid) affect employee engagement, trust, and sense of belonging?

Sub-Question 2: How does leadership adaptation influence the preservation and development of organizational culture in remote work contexts?

Sub-Question 3: What communication and collaboration strategies are most effective in supporting culture in distributed teams?

Sub-Question 4: What best practices can be identified for sustaining productivity, engagement, and collaboration in digital-first work environments?

In alignment with qualitative methodology, the study employed a set of analytic propositions (H0–H9) functioning as structured hypotheses to guide coding and thematic comparison rather than as statistical claims. These ranged from H0 (no relationship between remote work and culture) to H9 (remote work negatively affects interpersonal communication and collaboration). The complete theoretical rationale for each proposition is grounded in prior scholarship including Rogers (2022), Sardeshmukh et al. (2012), Saleem and Khan (2024), Donati et al. (2024), and Rapo (2022).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative research design using semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method. Qualitative methodology was selected because organizational culture is a socially constructed phenomenon best understood through rich, interpretive inquiry rather than numerical measurement (Rogers, 2022; Yeke & Özveren, 2024). Semi-structured interviews, as described by Henshaw (2021), allow participants to explain their experiences in their own terms while maintaining sufficient structure for thematic comparison across cases.

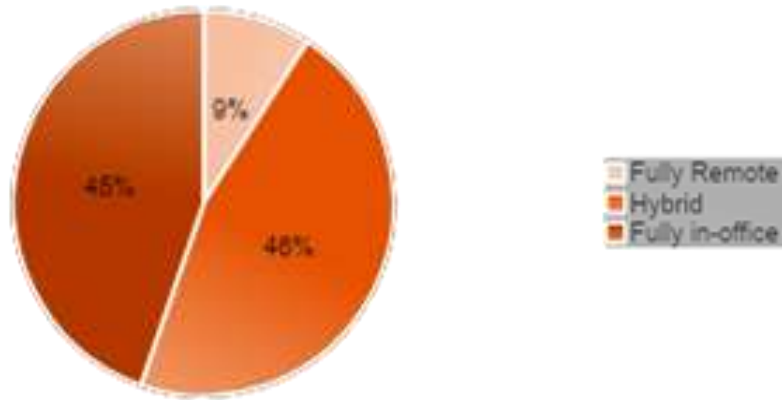
The study was exploratory and inductive in orientation, seeking to uncover nuanced managerial perspectives on how remote work shapes organizational culture rather than confirming predefined causal relationships. The multi-industry design ensured that findings were not limited to a single sector, enabling a broader, more transferable analysis.

Sample and Participants

The study sample comprised 65 participants from international organizations across 13 countries. Participants were primarily managers and organizational leaders, ensuring that findings reflected decision-making authority and strategic cultural responsibility. In cases where senior managers were unavailable, middle-level managers or specialized employees were included with managerial delegation. The sample covered 15 industry sectors, including finance, information technology, healthcare, logistics, education, energy, construction, humanitarian work, retail, and government. The study employed purposive sampling, a common qualitative research approach, to intentionally select participants knowledgeable about managerial practices and organizational culture in remote and hybrid environments. Purposive sampling ensures that participants are chosen based on their relevance, experience, and ability to provide rich insights into the research topic, rather than being selected at random; this method is particularly suitable for exploratory qualitative studies where depth of understanding is prioritized over statistical generalizability (Patton, 2002; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Table 1: Distribution of Work Models Among Interviewed Companies (n = 65)

Work Model	Number of Participants	Percentage (%)
Fully Remote	6	9.23%
Hybrid	30	46.15%
Fully In-Office	29	44.62%
Total	65	100%

*Figure 1: Distribution of work models among interviewed companies (n = 65)*

The distribution of work models demonstrates a clear preference for flexible arrangements. Of the 65 companies represented, 46% adopted a hybrid model, 45% operated fully in-office, and only 9% were fully remote. These findings suggest that hybrid work has become the dominant organizational model, reflecting a broader post-pandemic trend toward balancing workplace flexibility with the benefits of in-person collaboration and organizational cohesion.

Table 2: Demographic Profile by Age Group (n = 65)

Age Group	Number of Participants	Percentage (%)
25–34	15	23.08%
35–44	23	35.38%
45–54	17	26.15%
55+	10	15.38%
Total	65	100%

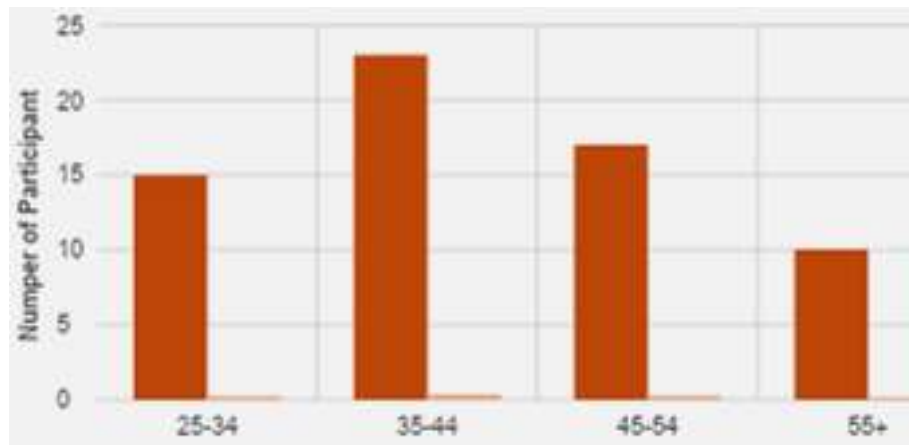


Figure 2: Distribution of Participants by Age Group (n = 65)

Figure 2 presents the distribution of participants across the four age categories. The largest group was aged 35–44 years ($n = 23$), followed by 45–54 years ($n = 17$), 25–34 years ($n = 15$), and 55 years and above ($n = 10$). This indicates that the sample was primarily composed of mid-career professionals while still capturing perspectives from both younger and older participants.

The findings also reveal generational differences in work arrangements. Participants aged 25–34 were more likely to work in hybrid or fully remote settings, whereas fully in-office arrangements were more common among those aged 55 and above. The following tables and figures provide a detailed comparison of work model preferences across the four age groups.

Table 3: Geographic Distribution of Participants (n = 65)

Country	No. of Participants	Percentage (%)
Yemen	32	49.23%
Jordan	7	10.77%
UAE	6	9.23%
USA	5	7.69%
Egypt	5	7.69%
Turkey	3	4.61%
Others (UK, Germany, Czech Republic, Russia, Algeria, KSA, Djibouti)	7	10.77%
Total	65	100%

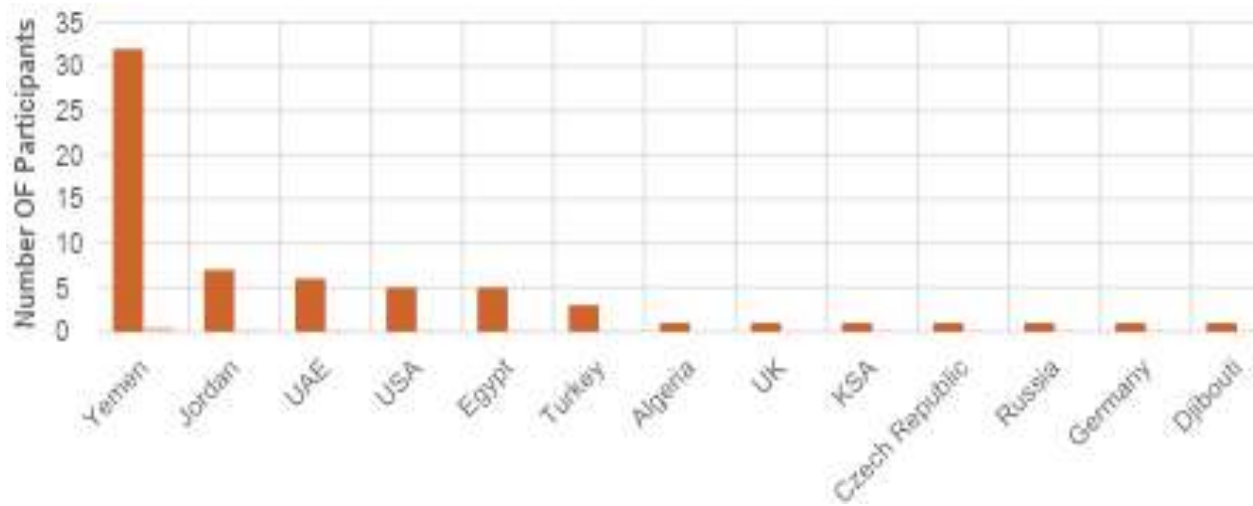


Figure 3: Country of origin of participants (n = 65)

Figure 3 illustrates the geographical distribution of the participants across thirteen countries. Yemen represented the largest proportion of the sample (49.23%), followed by Jordan (10.77%), the United Arab Emirates (9.23%), the United States and Egypt (7.69% each), and Turkey (4.61%). The remaining countries each accounted for 1.54% of the sample.

This international distribution provides a diverse cross-cultural perspective, allowing the study to capture variations in remote work experiences across different organizational, cultural, and economic contexts. Such diversity enhances the transferability of the findings and offers a broader understanding of how remote work and company culture are shaped in different national settings.

Table 4: Seniority Level Distribution (n = 65)

Seniority Level	No. of Participants	Percentage (%)
Top Management (CEO, MD, Business Owner)	12	18.50%
Senior Management (GM, Director, Branch Manager)	22	33.80%
Middle Management (Dept. Manager, Ops. Manager)	13	20.00%
Junior / Specialized Positions	12	18.50%
Specialized Experts / Freelancers	6	9.20%
Total	65	100%

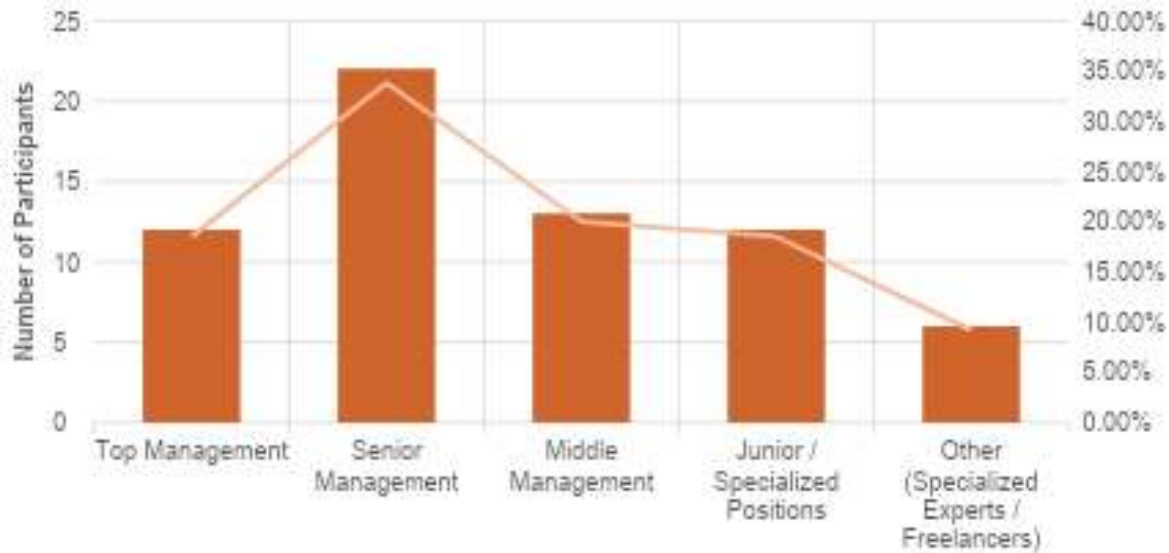


Figure 4: Distribution of participants by seniority level (n = 65)

Figure 4 presents the distribution of participants across five seniority levels. Senior management constituted the largest group (33.8%), followed by middle management (20.0%), and both top management and junior/specialized positions (18.5% each). Specialized experts and freelancers represented the smallest group (9.2%). This distribution reflects the study's emphasis on managerial perspectives, with non-managerial participants included only when providing insights from a managerial viewpoint.

Data Collection Procedures

Interviews were conducted via email, WhatsApp, and LinkedIn to accommodate participants located in different countries and time zones. Questions were structured around six thematic domains: (1) remote work policies and support, (2) impact on company culture, (3) benefits, challenges, and solutions, (4) productivity and employee engagement, (5) leadership and communication, and (6) the future of remote work. In total, 15 guiding questions were used across the six themes, supplemented by demographic questions. Where respondents communicated in Arabic, interview questions and responses were carefully translated into English, with close attention maintained to preserve the accuracy and meaning of each response.

Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis with MAXQDA 26

Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019), a widely adopted qualitative methodology that allows for the systematic identification,

organization, and interpretation of patterns across datasets. The analysis was supported by MAXQDA 26, a professional qualitative data analysis software package, which facilitated systematic coding, code frequency analysis, thematic visualization, and sentiment-based categorization. The analytical process involved six phases: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Sentiment coding classifying responses as highly positive, positive, neutral, negative, or mixed was applied to several thematic questions to quantify the directionality of participants' views.

The study's primary analytical approach combined deductive coding (informed by the conceptual framework and analytic propositions) with inductive coding that allowed new themes and patterns to emerge from the interview data, consistent with established qualitative research traditions (Patton, 2002; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Trustworthiness was maintained through prolonged engagement with the data, reflexive documentation, and thick description of findings, following the naturalistic inquiry criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). The multi-sectoral, cross-national sampling strategy further supports the analytic generalizability of the findings, in line with case-based qualitative research principles (Yin, 2018).

Ethical Considerations

All participants provided informed consent prior to data collection and were assured of confidentiality and the right to withdraw at any stage. Responses were anonymized in transcription and analysis. The study adhered to the ethical guidelines of Istanbul Aydın University's Institute of Graduate Studies. Given the international nature of the sample, additional care was taken in the translation process to protect participant identity and preserve the integrity of their statements.

FINDINGS: THEMATIC ANALYSIS

The thematic analysis of 65 semi-structured interviews yielded six primary themes encompassing 15 interview questions. What follows is a structured presentation of the most significant findings within each theme, supported by key tables and representative participant quotations.

Theme 1: Remote Work Policies and Support

The analysis revealed substantial variation in the formalization and quality of organizational support for remote work. More than half of participating organizations (52.31%, n

= 34) reported formal support for remote work, providing structured arrangements and practical facilitation. However, 38.46% (n = 25) reported that their organizations did not support remote work, often preferring traditional on-site operations. Only 7.69% (n = 5) described conditional support permitting remote work only under specific circumstances such as emergencies or health-related needs.

Table 5: Organizational Policy Orientation Toward Remote Work (n = 65)

Policy Category	Participants (n)	Percentage (%)
Formal Support	34	52.31%
Non-Support	25	38.46%
Conditional Support	5	7.69%
Unclear / Insufficient Response	1	1.54%
Total	65	100%

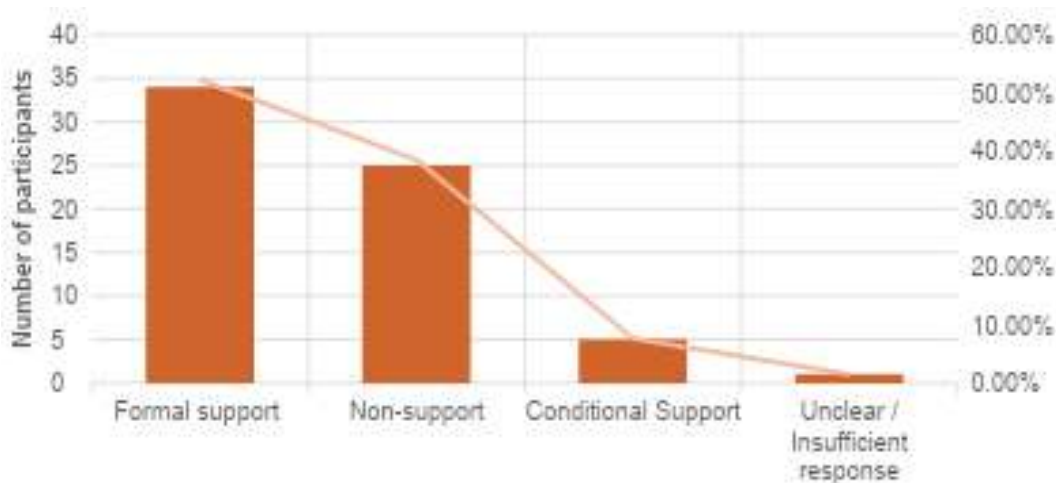


Figure 5: Distribution of organizational policy orientation toward remote work

Overall, the visual distribution shows that while remote and hybrid work arrangements have become increasingly common, many organizations continue to rely on traditional office-based models, indicating uneven adoption across sectors and organizational contexts.

The following *Table 6* summarizes the organizational practices used to facilitate remote work, drawing only on participants who provided detailed descriptions of how remote work was implemented within their organizations (n = 29 of 65).

Table 6: Remote work support mechanisms reported by participants

Support Mechanisms	Frequency	Brief Description
Technological support	16	Provision of digital tools, equipment, and technological resources to facilitate remote work.
Work arrangement practices	9	Flexible work arrangements, including remote schedules and task-based work structures.
Communication support	6	Use of digital communication channels to maintain coordination and interaction among employees.
Employee support and HR practices	6	HR initiatives promoting employee well-being, accommodation, and equal opportunities in remote settings.
Infrastructure and access support	4	Provision of secure access to organizational systems and internal networks.
Incentive and empowerment support	3	Practices encouraging autonomy, empowerment, and employee motivation in remote work.
Managerial and administrative support	2	Supervisory coordination and administrative practices supporting remote work implementation.

* *"Frequencies represent coded references; individual interviews/participants could contribute to multiple codes."*

Among the 29 participants who described specific support mechanisms, the most common was technological support (n = 16), encompassing laptops, remote applications, and strong internet connectivity. Work arrangement practices such as flexible scheduling and role-based remote options were described by 9 participants, while communication support (n = 6) and employee-oriented HR practices (n = 6) were also reported. Formal managerial or administrative support structures were mentioned by only 2 participants, indicating that remote work frequently existed as a permitted arrangement rather than a fully institutionalized organizational system.

Sentiment analysis of responses to the question of organizational support revealed a polarized distribution: 36.9% of participants expressed highly positive sentiments, 15.4% expressed positive sentiments, 7.7% were neutral, and 38.5% expressed negative sentiments. One participant captured the reality of informal remote work support:

"We support remote work through flexible arrangements, digital collaboration tools, infrastructure support, and equal opportunities for remote employees."

In contrast, a manager from a logistics firm stated:

"Remote work is frowned upon and only allowed in emergencies."

Regarding post-pandemic perceptual change, 60% of participants (n = 39) reported a positive shift toward greater acceptance and normalization of remote work, while 31% (n = 20) reported no change, and only 3% (n = 2) described a negative reassessment. These findings confirm the broad cultural transition underway in organizational attitudes toward distributed work.

Theme 2: Impact on Company Culture

Participants' perceptions of remote work's cultural impact were diverse and context-dependent, resisting reduction to simple positive or negative narratives.

Table 7: Sentiment Distribution of Perceived Cultural Impact (n = 65)

Sentiment Category	Participants (n)	Percentage (%)
Positive Cultural Impact	15	23.07%
Negative Cultural Impact	11	16.92%
Mixed Cultural Impact	8	12.31%
Impact Acknowledged – Unspecified	7	10.77%
No Cultural Impact	17	26.15%
No Answer	7	10.77%
Total	65	100%

The mixed responses further suggest that the cultural impact of remote work largely depends on managerial practices, communication processes, and the nature of the work environment.

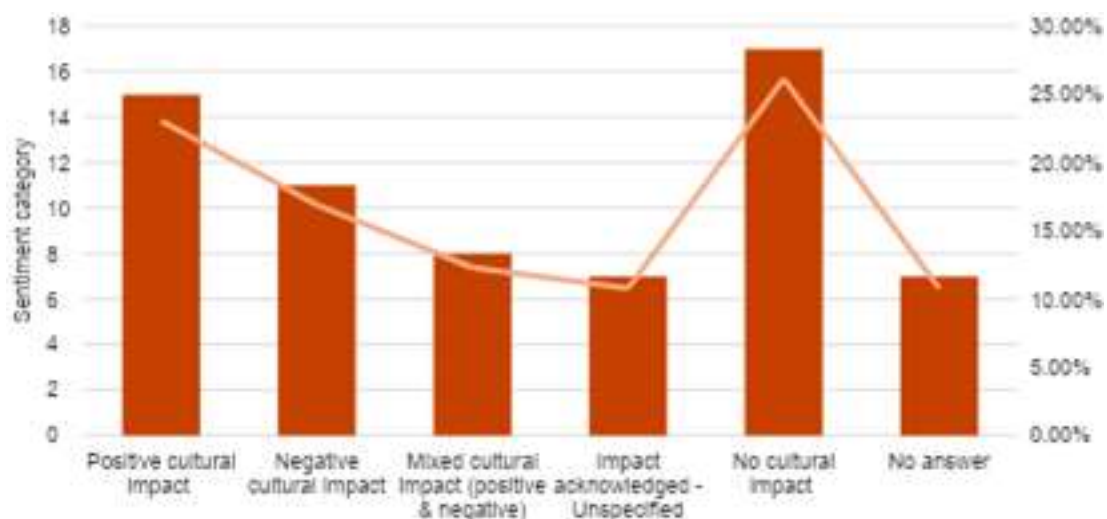


Figure 6: Sentiment distribution of perceived cultural impact of remote work

Positive cultural impacts were most commonly associated with increased organizational flexibility, enhanced digital literacy, and stronger employee autonomy. One participant noted: 'Remote work has made us more flexible and tech-savvy, encouraging digital communication and independent work' (Interview 20). Negative impacts were primarily attributed to reduced informal interaction, social isolation, diminished team cohesion, and weakened spontaneous collaboration. As one manager described: 'Remote work creates clear walls between employees' (Interview 6).

On the question of belonging and team cohesion, 38.46% (n = 25) of participants reported no noticeable influence often because remote work was well-managed, limited in scope, or because the organization's distributed structure already accommodated physical separation. Positive influence on belonging was reported by 12.30% (n = 8), while 13.85% (n = 9) reported negative influence and 16.92% (n = 11) described mixed effects. The most frequently cited strategies for maintaining organizational values in remote settings included regular communication and digital check-ins (21.54%, n = 14), structured organizational systems such as onboarding and performance reviews (13.85%, n = 9), and hybrid or in-person reinforcement practices (9.23%, n = 6).

Theme 3: Benefits, Challenges and Solutions

The analysis identified a range of benefits and challenges associated with remote work, revealing the dual-outcome nature of distributed arrangements:

Primary Benefits identified by participants:

- Flexibility and improved work–life balance
- Reduced commuting time and associated costs
- Access to a broader talent pool
- Increased employee autonomy and self-management
- Operational continuity during disruptions
- Potential for increased productivity in task-focused roles

Primary Challenges identified by participants:

- Social isolation and reduced informal interaction
- Communication barriers and misunderstandings
- Difficulty maintaining team cohesion and shared values
- Blurred boundaries between work and personal life
- Challenges in mentoring, onboarding, and professional development
- Reduced visibility for performance evaluation
- Unequal access to technology and digital infrastructure

Solutions reported by participants clustered around proactive communication practices (structured meetings, regular check-ins, accessible leadership), well-being and engagement-oriented interventions (virtual social events, mental health support), and structural or policy-based approaches (clear remote work guidelines, outcome-based performance evaluation). A significant minority ($n = 25$) reported that their organizations had not implemented any systematic solution to remote work challenges, reflecting the uneven maturity of remote work management across the sample.

Theme 4: Productivity and Employee Engagement

Productivity perceptions were diverse and highly contingent on organizational context. Among participants who reported on productivity impacts:

Table 8: Summary of Perceived Productivity Impact (n = 65)

Impact Category	n	(%)	Brief Description
Positive impact on productivity	21	32.3%	Productivity improved due to flexibility, reduced commuting, fewer distractions, and effective digital tools.
Negative impact on productivity	5	7.7%	Productivity declined because of reduced supervision, communication challenges, and accountability issues.
Mixed impact on productivity	8	12.3%	Productivity outcomes varied depending on job characteristics, management practices, and individual circumstances.
Slight or limited impact	3	4.6%	Only minor or temporary effects on productivity were reported.
No significant impact	7	10.8%	Productivity remained largely unchanged despite remote work arrangements.
Not applicable / Remote work not implemented	6	9.2%	Organizations requiring on-site work could not assess productivity effects.
No answer	15	23.1%	No response was provided to this question.
Total	65	100%	

Overall, positive perceptions of productivity were more common than negative ones, with nearly one-third of participants reporting productivity gains from remote work. However, the findings also indicate that productivity outcomes are context-dependent and influenced by managerial practices, communication effectiveness, and the nature of the work itself.

Positive productivity impacts were most strongly associated with employee autonomy, reduced office distractions, flexible scheduling, and clearer focus on deliverables. Negative

impacts were linked to inadequate supervision, lack of structure, communication delays, and difficulties managing distributed teams. Notably, productivity was reported as 'conditional' by a number of participants positive when expectations were clear and support was available, negative when neither was the case.

Employee engagement showed a similarly nuanced pattern. Regarding motivation, 12 participants reported a positive impact of remote work, 9 reported a negative impact, and 7 described motivation as conditional. Regarding engagement specifically, 7 participants reported a positive impact, 9 a negative impact, and 10 described engagement as conditional or context-dependent. A key insight from the data was that engagement is communication-dependent rather than location-dependent: employees reported higher engagement when expectations were clear, communication was frequent, and leadership was accessible.

Measures used by organizations to maintain remote employee engagement included structured interaction and regular team meetings, monitoring and performance follow-up, ongoing communication practices, development and well-being support, and recognition and incentive programs. A significant proportion of organizations ($n = 10$) reported having no engagement measures in place for remote employees.

Theme 5: Leadership and Communication

Leadership adaptation emerged as the most influential organizational variable shaping cultural outcomes in remote settings. The analysis of Theme 5 responses revealed that transparent and structured communication was the most frequently cited leadership practice for maintaining cultural coherence across distributed teams.

Table 9: Leadership Communication Mechanisms (n = 65)

Communication Mechanism	Frequency	Brief Description
Digital communication channels and tools	15	Use of digital platforms, messaging applications, video conferencing, and shared repositories to facilitate communication.
Structured communication practices	15	Regular meetings, check-ins, updates, and formal communication routines to maintain transparency.
Performance and outcome-based transparency	9	Clear expectations, task monitoring, timelines, and performance reporting mechanisms.
Open-door and feedback-oriented leadership	6	Leadership accessibility, employee dialogue, and continuous feedback practices.
Trust-based communication and	5	Transparency built through trust, fairness, and

Table 9...

relational transparency		interpersonal relationships.
No transparent communication practices identified	7	Absence of formal transparency mechanisms or remote work arrangements.
No answer	17	No response or insufficient information for coding.

* *"Frequencies represent coded references; individual interviews/participants could contribute to multiple parent codes."*

On leadership fairness and inclusion between remote and in-office employees, 12 participants referred to performance-based fairness mechanisms, 8 emphasized equity and equal access practices, and 8 described fairness as role-dependent or conditional. Six participants reported the absence of formal fairness mechanisms, a finding that aligns with the literature on the risks of spatial inequity in hybrid work arrangements.

Leaders who adopted transparent communication, equitable decision-making, and consistent feedback were more successful in reinforcing trust, accountability, and inclusion. This aligns with Adams' Equity Theory (1963), which posits that fairness in treatment and recognition enhances motivation and commitment, and with Blau's Social Exchange Theory (1964), which emphasizes reciprocal trust as the foundation of employee commitment. This pattern is consistent with Hai and Tien's (2025) finding that a supportive organizational culture is a significant predictor of employee satisfaction, reinforcing the view that cultural and leadership conditions, rather than location, ultimately determine employee outcomes.

Theme 6: The Future of Remote Work

Analysis of the theme 6 suggests that the participants' expectations regarding the future of remote work were predominantly positive.

Table 10: Future Expectations Regarding Remote Work Continuation (n = 65)

Expectation Category	Participants (n)	Percentage (%)
Expect Continuation of Remote Work	37	56.92%
Partial or Conditional Continuation (Hybrid)	5	7.69%
Do Not Expect Continuation	8	12.31%
Uncertain	2	3.08%
No Answer / Not Applicable	13	20.00%
Total	65	100%

Participants who expected continuation frequently cited cost efficiency, flexibility, access to global talent, and business continuity as primary justifications. Several noted that hybrid work combining remote flexibility with periodic in-person interaction represented the most balanced and sustainable future model. This is consistent with Bloom's (2021) projection that around 70% of companies plan to adopt hybrid work arrangements as a long-term strategy, and echoes earlier experimental evidence from Bloom, Liang, Roberts, and Ying (2015), who found that structured remote work arrangements could improve performance when accompanied by clear protocols and managerial oversight.

Regarding recommendations for organizations building strong culture in remote environments, the most commonly cited practices were intentional communication, digital leadership, autonomy and trust, investment in cultural development, and regular in-person touchpoints. One participant's recommendation captured the dominant theme: 'Stay connected, be transparent, celebrate small wins remotely, and never forget that culture is built in the details, not in the big gestures.'

DISCUSSION

Remote Work as an Organizational Amplifier

The clearest pattern running through all six themes is that remote work does not generate cultural outcomes on its own. It functions instead as an amplifier: a structural condition that takes whatever managerial and communicative capacity already exists inside an organization and renders its strengths or deficiencies far more visible, and far more consequential, than physical co-presence ever allowed. Two organizations could adopt an identical work-from-anywhere policy and arrive at opposite cultural trajectories, not because the policy differed, but because one had functioning communication habits and trust-based leadership to amplify, while the other had only ever maintained cohesion through the accident of shared physical space.

Evidence for this amplification effect surfaces independently in three of the six themes. The 38.46% of organizations in Theme 1 reporting no formal remote work policy were not simply slower to embrace remote work as a practice; many already showed signs of weaker structural planning before the transition, and the absence of remote policy functioned as a symptom of that pre-existing condition rather than its cause. Theme 2's split verdicts on cultural impact positive for some participants, negative for others, neutral or mixed for many are difficult to explain if remote work were itself the operative variable, since all respondents experienced broadly the same external shift. What differed was what each organization brought to that shift: the compensatory mechanisms, or their absence,

that determined whether cultural cohesion survived the move to distance. Theme 5's findings point in the same direction from the leadership side where transparency and structured communication were already part of how managers operated, those same practices simply continued to function remotely, sustaining the culture rather than rebuilding it from nothing.

Why the Amplification Effect Occurs: The Loss of Proximity Scaffolding

The amplifier effect described above has a specific mechanical explanation, and understanding it clarifies why remote work feels disruptive even to organizations that ultimately weather it well. Physical proximity does not just enable management; it quietly substitutes for it. A manager who can see, overhear, and casually check in on their team gathers a continuous stream of informal information about morale, workload, and friction that requires no deliberate effort to collect. Remote work does not remove the need for this information it removes the free, ambient channel through which it used to arrive. What looks like remote work demanding more communication, more transparency, and more attentiveness from leaders is, more precisely, leaders having to deliberately produce information and connection that proximity used to generate as a byproduct of simply sharing a room.

Framed this way, the practical implication shifts. Organizations investing heavily in remote-work technology while treating leadership behavior as a secondary concern are solving the wrong half of the problem the tools restore bandwidth, but they do not restore the deliberate attentiveness that proximity used to provide automatically. Najem's (2025) finding that leaders without explicit remote management strategies saw disproportionate declines in both performance and engagement is consistent with exactly this account: the absence of a deliberate substitute for proximity scaffolding, not the absence of technology, is what produced the decline.

Evaluation of Analytic Propositions

The study's structured hypothesis framework (H0–H9) yielded a coherent pattern of support and refinement. H0 postulating no relationship between remote work and organizational culture was rejected; evidence across all six themes demonstrates that remote work meaningfully influences communication patterns, trust dynamics, engagement levels, and cultural cohesion. H1 through H9 were largely supported, though with important nuances:

Table 11: Summary of Proposition Evaluation

Proposition	Support Level	Key Finding
H0: No relationship	Rejected	Remote work influences culture through mediating mechanisms
H1: Cultural perception impact	Strongly Supported	Remote work reshapes how culture is perceived and enacted
H2: Well-being and work–life balance	Supported (Conditional)	Positive when flexible; negative when boundaries are unclear
H3: Cultural initiatives and productivity	Supported	Structured initiatives maintain engagement and alignment
H4: Engagement and satisfaction	Supported (Nuanced)	Higher when trust-based leadership is present
H5: Flexibility and autonomy	Strongly Supported	Autonomy strengthens loyalty and cultural commitment
H6: Policy mitigation	Supported	Clear policies stabilize culture in distributed environments
H7: Lower perceived support	Supported (Nuanced)	Physical distance weakens informal ties unless compensated
H8: Innovation and well-being	Refined	Spontaneous collaboration harder to replicate digitally
H9: Communication and collaboration	Supported	Remote work formalizes communication, reducing relational depth

Collectively, the propositions support an integrated theoretical interpretation: the cultural consequences of remote work are conditional and mediated. They are conditioned by organizational readiness and leadership quality, and they are mediated by communication practices and trust formation processes. This reframing challenges simplistic models that treat remote work itself as the causal variable in cultural outcomes. The pattern observed for H8 in particular echoes Sarvi's (2024) finding that remote work can constrain an organization's innovative culture not because distance itself suppresses creativity, but because the informal, spontaneous interactions that typically generate innovative exchange are structurally harder to replicate in digital environments.

National and Sectoral Context as Governing Conditions

An analytically important pattern in the data was the role of national and sectoral context in shaping remote work adoption and cultural outcomes. Participants from Yemen (49.2% of the

sample) were disproportionately concentrated in fully in-office arrangements, even in sectors where remote work was common in other national contexts. Banking participants from Yemen were exclusively in-office, while a banking participant from Djibouti reported hybrid arrangements. Similarly, participants from the United States, Germany, and the Czech Republic were predominantly in hybrid or remote models.

This geographical clustering indicates that remote work adoption is shaped not only by organizational factors but by national cultural norms, institutional structures, digital infrastructure, and macro-level governance. Cross-cultural organizational behavior research (Gelfand, Erez, & Aycan, 2007; Tung, 2008) confirms that national context sets important boundary conditions for the transferability of organizational practices. This is consistent with Van Zoonen et al. (2021), who found that employees' adjustment to remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic was shaped by a combination of individual, organizational, and broader environmental factors rather than by remote work arrangements alone. These macro-level governing conditions operate above the organizational level and must be accounted for in interpreting findings and developing recommendations.

THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Theoretical Contributions

This study makes several distinctive theoretical contributions to the literature on remote work and organizational culture:

First, it proposes the 'revealing condition' framework a conceptualization of remote work as a structural context that exposes rather than creates organizational strengths and weaknesses. This reframing has significant implications for how researchers model the relationship between remote work and cultural outcomes, suggesting that mediating variables (leadership quality, communication structure, organizational readiness) must be explicitly included in any theoretically adequate model.

Second, the study integrates multiple established theoretical frameworks Schein and Schein's (2016) Organizational Culture Theory, Blau's (1964) Social Exchange Theory, Adams' (1963) Equity Theory, and Contingency Theory into a unified explanatory framework for understanding how remote work interacts with culture. This theoretical pluralism reflects the genuine complexity of the phenomenon and resists reductionist explanations.

Third, by drawing on a multicultural, multi-sector sample spanning 13 countries and 15 industries, the study provides evidence for the importance of national-cultural and sectoral boundary conditions in shaping remote work outcomes a dimension frequently absent from single-country or single-sector studies.

Fourth, the study contributes a validated six-theme analytical structure for examining remote work's cultural dimensions, demonstrating that policies, culture, benefits/challenges, engagement, leadership, and future orientation must be examined as an integrated system rather than as independent variables.

Practical Contributions

The study offers directly actionable insights for organizational leaders, HR professionals, and management practitioners navigating distributed work environments. By identifying the specific managerial practices, communication mechanisms, and leadership behaviors that distinguish organizations with positive remote cultural outcomes from those experiencing fragmentation, the research provides a diagnostic and prescriptive framework for organizational improvement.

MANAGERIAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Establish Clear Remote Work Policies and Organizational Guidelines

The finding that 38.46% of organizations lacked formal remote work policies and that only 29 of 65 participants described specific support mechanisms reveals that policy formalization remains a critical organizational gap. Organizations should develop comprehensive remote work policies that define expectations regarding communication frequency, availability, performance evaluation criteria, collaboration norms, and equity between remote and in-office employees. Such policies create transparency, reduce perceptions of unfairness, and signal organizational commitment to distributed work as a sustainable strategy rather than a crisis accommodation.

Prioritize Structured and Transparent Communication

Communication emerged as the most consistent differentiator between organizations experiencing positive and negative remote cultural outcomes. Managers should implement structured communication routines including regularly scheduled team meetings, clear information-sharing protocols, accessible feedback mechanisms, and defined response norms for asynchronous channels. Digital tools alone are insufficient; what matters is the consistency, intentionality, and relational quality of communication practices. Organizations should invest in communication training for remote managers and establish explicit communication charters for distributed teams.

Adopt Trust-Based, Outcome-Oriented Leadership

The data consistently show that control-oriented supervision in remote contexts produces lower engagement, higher disengagement, and weaker cultural attachment. Leaders should shift from monitoring physical presence or activity to evaluating outputs, outcomes, and developmental progress. This requires a fundamental reorientation of management culture from presence as a proxy for performance to results as the genuine measure of contribution. Trust-based leadership, operationalized through clear expectations, regular check-ins, and generous acknowledgment of achievement, creates the psychological safety necessary for remote employees to remain engaged and culturally connected.

Strengthen Culture Through Deliberate Social Practices

The loss of informal interaction the 'watercooler' conversations, spontaneous collaboration, and ambient social bonding that physical co-presence enables represents one of the most significant cultural risks of remote work. Organizations should compensate through deliberate social design: virtual social hours, informal communication channels, digital recognition programs, and periodic in-person gatherings in hybrid models. These practices maintain team identity, strengthen interpersonal relationships, and transmit organizational values in the absence of shared physical space.

Support Employee Well-Being and Boundary Management

Organizations should actively promote healthy remote work practices, including flexible scheduling combined with clear expectations about availability, reasonable workload management, psychological support resources, and explicit encouragement to maintain work-life boundaries. The evidence shows that well-being in remote contexts is not automatic it requires organizational scaffolding.

Invest in Remote Leadership Development

Managing distributed teams requires a distinct competency profile from traditional office management. Organizations should invest in leadership development programs specifically addressing virtual team management, cross-cultural digital communication, trust-building across distance, conflict resolution in asynchronous environments, and inclusive leadership for hybrid teams. This investment represents one of the highest-return organizational strategies available for sustaining culture in distributed work environments.

LIMITATIONS

Like all empirical research, this study encountered several methodological and contextual limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings:

Asynchronous data collection: The majority of interviews were conducted via email, WhatsApp, and Google Forms rather than real-time video or in-person conversation. While this approach enabled international reach, it limited the possibility of real-time clarification, follow-up probing, and the richer relational dynamics of synchronous interviews. Asynchronous responses may also have been more carefully curated and less spontaneous than verbal interview responses.

Language translation: Interview questions and responses were translated between English and Arabic to accommodate participants from non-English-speaking contexts. While careful translation procedures were employed, the translation process introduces potential for nuance loss or interpretive variation.

Managerial-dominant perspective: The study's primary focus on managers and organizational leaders means that employee experiences of remote work including frontline perceptions of cultural change, engagement, and well-being are largely absent from the direct data. A more balanced inclusion of employee perspectives would have strengthened the completeness of the cultural picture.

Geographic concentration: While the sample is internationally diverse in formal terms, 49.2% of participants were based in Yemen. This concentration introduces a potential regional bias, particularly given Yemen's specific political, economic, and digital infrastructure context. Findings should be interpreted with appropriate caution when applied to other national or regional contexts.

Limited use of MAXQDA 26 capabilities: Time constraints prevented full utilization of MAXQDA 26's advanced analytical features, including deeper comparative analysis, relational matrices, and advanced visualization. Future research could extend the analytical depth through more comprehensive software utilization.

Cross-sectional design: The study captures perceptions at a single point in time. Longitudinal research would be needed to track how remote work practices and cultural outcomes evolve as organizations mature in their remote work capabilities.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The findings of this study point to several productive directions for future scholarly inquiry:

- Longitudinal studies examining how remote work practices and cultural outcomes evolve over time as organizations mature in their remote work capabilities.

- Employee-centered research that counterbalances the managerial perspective of this study, including the voices of frontline, operational, and junior employees in distributed teams.
- Sector-specific deep dives exploring how industries with specific cultural, operational, or regulatory characteristics financial services, healthcare, education, creative industries experience remote work's cultural consequences differently.
- Comparative cross-country research that systematically examines how national cultural norms, labor regulations, and digital infrastructure shape remote work adoption and cultural outcomes.
- Mixed-method research combining the rich depth of qualitative interviews with the broader generalizability of quantitative surveys.
- AI and digital monitoring: Research examining how AI-based performance management tools and digital surveillance affect trust, cultural perception, and well-being in remote contexts.
- Leadership generation and remote work adoption: Investigating how the generational background of organizational leaders influences remote work acceptance, given the demographic patterns observed in this study.
- Sustainable remote work frameworks: Developing and empirically testing organizational models for sustaining productivity, cultural cohesion, and well-being across the full range of distributed work arrangements.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine the impact of remote work on company culture through the perspectives of managers operating within international organizational contexts. The findings demonstrate unambiguously that remote work itself is not the primary determinant of cultural strength or weakness. Rather, the cultural consequences of distributed work depend on what organizations do with remote work, how they design it, lead it, communicate through it, and sustain it over time.

The 65 semi-structured interviews analyzed in this study, spanning 13 countries and 15 industry sectors, reveal a consistent and theoretically coherent pattern: organizations characterized by structured communication, trust-based leadership, fair performance evaluation, and deliberate cultural stewardship maintained cultural cohesion and employee engagement across physical distance. Organizations lacking these capabilities experienced cultural fragmentation, social isolation, and reduced organizational identity not because remote work

caused these problems, but because remote work removed the informal organizational scaffolding that had previously concealed them.

Remote work has transitioned from a crisis response to an enduring organizational reality. More than half of participants (56.92%) expected remote and hybrid arrangements to persist as core features of their organizations' future operational strategy. This trajectory is irreversible. The challenge for organizational leaders is not whether to manage distributed work, but how to do so in ways that sustain the cultural richness, relational depth, and shared purpose that characterize high-performing organizations.

The study's core recommendation is simple in principle but demanding in practice: treat culture as a management responsibility, not a spatial accident. In traditional office environments, culture can propagate informally through proximity, shared ritual, and environmental cues. In distributed environments, culture must be deliberately designed, actively transmitted, and continuously reinforced through leadership behavior, communication practice, and organizational investment. This is the challenge and the opportunity that the remote work era presents to every organization committed to building and sustaining a strong, cohesive, and adaptive organizational culture.

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