



Telecommuting and Organizational Culture Reshaping in the Digital Era: A Mini Literature Review

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Abstract. In the digital era, the widespread adoption of telecommuting is fundamentally reshaping organizational culture, shifting it from a location-bound model to one centered on flexibility, autonomy, and digital trust. As telecommuting and its hybrid forms become deeply embedded in organizational operations, they represent an ongoing process of re-evaluating and redefining traditional cultural mechanisms reliant on physical presence, such as rituals and informal social interactions. In this process, the deep-seated assumptions and expressed values of organizations are continuously negotiated, moving beyond a primary focus on co-located supervision towards fostering outcomes-based performance, psychological safety, and a shared identity to sustain effectiveness. Supported by digital communication platforms and collaborative tools, remote work practices now more directly influence employees' sense of belonging, commitment, and the very artifacts of culture. By reviewing theories of organizational culture and related telecommuting research, this mini-review focuses on the dynamic, reciprocal relationship between telecommuting structures and cultural elements, examining their varied impacts on equity, communication, and cohesion. It further highlights the critical role of adaptive leadership and intentional cultural scaffolding in understanding and navigating this transition. Additionally, this review calls for more nuanced research that leverages the digital context to better understand the divergent effects of these new work arrangements on diverse employee subgroups and organizational subcultures.

Keywords: Telecommuting, Hybrid Work, Organizational Culture, Digital Technology

1 Introduction

The digital transformation, accelerated by global shifts such as the COVID-19 pandemic, has made telecommuting—working from a location outside the traditional office using technology—a mainstream organizational practice (Kniffin, 2021; Haque, 2023). This shift disrupts the foundational pillars of traditional organizational culture, which have long been built on shared physical spaces, face-to-face

interactions, and observable routines. Organizational culture, defined as a pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solves problems of external adaptation and internal integration (Schein, 2016), is now being challenged and reshaped in virtual and hybrid environments. Where culture was once reinforced through watercooler conversations and shared office experiences, it must now be consciously constructed and communicated through digital channels.

This mini-review explores the interplay between telecommuting and organizational culture reshaping in the digital era. It begins by grounding the discussion in core cultural theories, namely Hofstede's cultural dimensions and Schein's three-level model, to establish an analytical framework. It then examines the impact of telecommuting on cultural components such as communication, trust, and equity. Finally, it considers the evolving model of hybrid work as a synthesis of remote and on-site practices. The paper argues that telecommuting is not merely a logistical change but a profound cultural catalyst, necessitating deliberate leadership and inclusive practices to build cohesive, adaptive, and high-performing organizations in the digital age.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Organizational Culture

2.1.1 Definition and Conceptualization.

Organizational culture has long been a core topic of management research, with a far-reaching impact on organizational identity, employee behavior, performance, and strategic achievements. A central debate in academia revolves around whether culture is "owned by the organization" as an asset or is "the essence of the organization itself." The former perspective treats culture as a system of shared assumptions, norms, and values that can guide behavior and processes through conscious management (Pettigrew, 1979; Barney, 1986). Pettigrew viewed culture as a publicly recognized meaning system guiding collective behavior, while Barney emphasized its strategic role in interactions with stakeholders. Conversely, other scholars posit that culture is an intrinsic characteristic, deeply embedded in an organization's processes, behaviors, and structures, evolving spontaneously through daily routines and symbolic interactions (Schein, 2016).

In the digital age, research further emphasizes the dynamic, socially constructed, and negotiated nature of culture, arguing it is generated through member interaction and continuously reshaped by contextual changes like the rise of remote work (Sackmann, 2022). Generally, organizational culture serves key functions: influencing efficiency, providing strategic direction, shaping external image, and supporting employee retention and motivation (Dhingra and Schaninger, 2021). A positive culture is linked to improved performance, innovation, and resilience, while a dysfunctional one can hinder adaptability.

2.1.2 Theoretical Framework: Hofstede and Schein.

To analyze the impact of telecommuting, established theoretical frameworks are essential. Hofstede's cultural dimension theory provides a macro-level lens, analyzing how societal-level values (e.g., Individualism vs. Collectivism, Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance) influence workplace behavior and management (Hofstede et al., 2010). For instance, telecommuting in a high Power Distance culture may reinforce hierarchical control through digital surveillance, whereas in a low Power Distance culture, it may empower employee autonomy (Kirkman et al., 2006). However, this model has been critiqued for its static, national-level focus, which may overlook intra-organizational dynamics and evolution (Ortiz et al., 2022).

Schein's three-level model (Artifacts, Espoused Values, and Basic Underlying Assumptions) offers a micro-level tool for diagnosing organizational culture (Schein, 1983). Artifacts (e.g., office layout, dress code) are most visibly disrupted by telecommuting, replaced by virtual meeting backgrounds and digital communication styles. Espoused values (e.g., "We trust our employees") are tested when employees are out of sight. The shift to remote work forces a re-examination of basic assumptions about productivity, presence, and collaboration. Hatch's (1993) cultural dynamics model expands on this by viewing culture as a continuous process of negotiation and symbolization, particularly relevant for understanding culture in flux during the digital transition.

Integrating Hofstede and Schein allows for a multi-layered analysis, connecting broad cultural influences with specific organizational practices and the deep, often unspoken, beliefs that telecommuting challenges. These theoretical frameworks are not merely descriptive; they serve as analytical tools for diagnosing how remote working is reshaping organizational culture. Schein's three-level model is particularly well-suited to this inquiry, as remote working has clearly disrupted various artefacts (for example, replacing office layouts with virtual backgrounds, and formal meetings with asynchronous chat), forcing people to re-examine their cherished values (for instance, whether commitments to trust and collaboration remain valid when employees are not physically present), and ultimately challenging fundamental assumptions regarding the nature of productivity, presence and commitment. Although Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions was originally developed at the national level, it offers insights into how the impact of remote working might differ across cultural contexts. For instance, in high-power-distance cultures, remote working may intensify digital surveillance and hierarchical control, whereas in low-power-distance environments, it may enhance autonomy. Similarly, individualism versus collectivism determines whether remote work is perceived as liberating (in individualistic cultures) or isolating (in collectivist cultures). Consequently, these frameworks are not merely cited as background knowledge but will be utilised in the following sections to explain how remote working alters the mechanisms of communication, trust and equality.

2.2 The Impact of Telecommuting on Organizational Culture

Building on the theoretical framework outlined above, this section will explore how remote working reshapes organizational culture according to the perspectives of

Schein and Hofstede. In line with Schein's perspective, we argue that remote working first disrupts various artefacts (such as communication channels, meeting formats and symbols of presence), which in turn compels people to renegotiate the values they hold (such as trust, transparency and accountability), and ultimately challenges fundamental assumptions about work itself (such as whether visibility equates to productivity). Drawing on Hofstede's perspective, we examine how cultural dimensions such as power distance and individualism moderate these effects, as these dimensions influence employees' expectations regarding supervision, autonomy and a sense of belonging. The following subsections apply these perspectives to three key cultural domains: communication, trust and equality.

2.2.1 Conceptual Origins and Evolution of Telecommuting.

Telecommuting is the practice of working from a location outside the traditional office, typically from home, using technology to perform job duties. Its modern concept was primarily proposed in the early 1970s, arguing that using telecommunications technology to replace physical commuting could save energy, alleviate traffic congestion, and improve work efficiency. This idea was later popularized by futurists like Toffler (1981), who envisioned the "electronic cottage." Academic research expanded to explore its impact on work's spatial and temporal structure (Olson, 1983) and its effects on job satisfaction and performance (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007).

2.2.2 Reshaping Communication, Trust, and Equity.

Telecommuting fundamentally disrupts traditional cultural communication mechanisms that rely on physical presence, rituals, and informal social interaction (Bilderback and Kilpatrick, 2024). While digital tools enhance task efficiency, they can weaken the informal knowledge sharing, mentoring, and social cohesion vital for cultural transmission (Waizenegger et al., 2020; McPhail et al., 2023). This necessitates a conscious effort to create new "digital artifacts" and rituals for connection.

Trust becomes a paramount cultural value. Research shows that a positive telecommuting experience within a trust-based, results-oriented culture can enhance employee identification and autonomy. Conversely, a culture of high control and surveillance may increase stress and a sense of isolation (Galea et al., 2014; Dassel and Klein, 2023).

A critical cultural challenge is equity. Telecommuting can exacerbate organizational inequalities; gender, race, and rank can influence access to remote opportunities, visibility, and inclusion in decision-making (Samnani, 2024). Marginalized groups may face heightened surveillance, biased performance evaluations, and social exclusion, undermining psychological safety and cultural participation. Therefore, building an effective remote or hybrid culture requires intentional practices based on trust, inclusive design, and outcome-focused management to mitigate these divides (Samnani, 2024).

2.3 Hybrid Work as a Cultural Synthesis

2.3.1 Definition and Adoption.

Hybrid work, which blends remote and on-site work, has emerged as a dominant model, allowing employees flexibility while retaining some physical collaboration (Galea et al., 2014; Kniffin, 2021). Surveys indicate a strong employee preference for hybrid arrangements, balancing autonomy with needed social and collaborative contact (Barrero et al., 2021).

2.3.2 Cultural Implications and Leadership.

Hybrid work represents the co-evolution of organizational culture and work design. Its success is deeply mediated by the existing culture. A supportive, inclusive, and adaptive culture can amplify hybrid work's benefits, fostering innovation and cohesion. In contrast, a rigid, hierarchical culture may lead to a "two-tier" system where on-site employees are perceived as more committed or visible, creating anxiety and detachment among remote staff (Samnani, 2024).

Leadership is crucial in this cultural reshaping. Leaders must model new behaviors, communicate consistently across channels, and design hybrid workflows that are fair and inclusive. They need to strategically align technology, communication protocols, and HR policies with desired cultural values like trust, accountability, and learning (Westover, 2024). The hybrid model makes the conscious management of culture—addressing both artifacts (like meeting protocols ensuring equal participation) and underlying assumptions (about what constitutes "real work")—more critical than ever.

3 Conclusion

This mini-review underscores that telecommuting and hybrid work are not merely operational shifts but powerful forces reshaping the very fabric of organizational culture. The transition from office-centric to digital-first or hybrid models challenges deep-seated cultural assumptions about presence, productivity, and collaboration. Theories from Hofstede and Schein provide valuable frameworks for diagnosing these changes at both macro and micro levels.

The research highlights dual imperatives: building cultures of high trust and outcome-based accountability to empower remote employees, and proactively designing for equity and inclusion to prevent new forms of digital-era disparity. The hybrid model, likely to persist, demands a deliberate and strategic approach to cultural leadership. Leaders must foster adaptive, learning-oriented cultures that can integrate on-site and remote experiences into a cohesive organizational identity.

Future research should leverage digital trace data and organizational network analysis to gain granular insights into how subcultures form in distributed teams and how different subgroups experience cultural change. Furthermore, longitudinal

studies are needed to understand the long-term evolution of culture in permanent hybrid organizations. As the digital era progresses, the organizations that thrive will be those that successfully reshape their culture to be as flexible, connected, and resilient as their work models.

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Disclosure of Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

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