



**THE SOCIOLOGY OF REMOTE WORK AND ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE:  
HOW THE SHIFT TO HYBRID AND REMOTE WORK RESHAPES WORKPLACE  
NORMS, POWER DYNAMICS, AND SOCIAL COHESION.**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The COVID-19 pandemic catalyzed an unprecedented shift toward remote and hybrid work, reshaping organisational life across sociological and management dimensions. This article examines how dispersed work arrangements influence identity, belonging, and workplace culture, while simultaneously addressing productivity, leadership, and policy-making challenges. Drawing on sociological theories of social cohesion, identity construction, and digital interaction, alongside management scholarship on performance, leadership, and organisational policy, the study employs a conceptual and secondary data approach with illustrative case studies from global organisations. Findings highlight the dual impact of hybrid work: it affords autonomy and flexibility, enhancing work-life integration, yet introduces risks of professional invisibility, fragmented networks, and inequities in access to social capital. Leadership that emphasizes trust, communication, and fairness, combined with policies promoting inclusion, well-being, and flexibility, emerges as critical for sustaining productivity and culture. The article contributes theoretically by bridging sociology and management in understanding hybrid work and practically by offering strategies for inclusive, resilient, and results-oriented organisational practices. Recommendations for future research include longitudinal studies on career progression, digital rituals, and cross-cultural differences in hybrid work adoption.*

**KEYWORDS:** Remote work; Hybrid work; Organisational culture; Social cohesion; Workplace identity; Digital work.



## INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic acted as an unprecedented catalyst for the rapid adoption of remote and hybrid work arrangements. While flexible work practices pre-dated the pandemic, their uptake was often limited to specific industries and roles, framed as perks rather than integral components of organisational strategy (Bailey and Kurland, 2002). The global health crisis fundamentally altered this reality, compelling organisations across sectors to transition swiftly to remote operations to maintain business continuity. This sudden shift did not merely affect the logistical aspects of work but also disrupted entrenched workplace norms, cultural practices, and social relations (Kniffin et al., 2021). What initially emerged as a crisis response has since evolved into a defining transformation of work, raising significant sociological and managerial questions about identity, belonging, productivity, and leadership in contemporary organisations.

From a sociological perspective, the workplace is more than an economic site; it functions as a cultural and social institution where identity, cohesion, and collective meaning are established. Remote work challenges many informal rituals, shared practices, and spontaneous interactions that sustain social cohesion and a sense of belonging (Goffman, 1959; Durkheim, 1997). The absence of shared physical spaces can undermine solidarity and complicate identity formation, particularly for new employees, marginalised groups, or those seeking professional visibility. Conversely, digital technologies offer alternative avenues for community-building and identity negotiation, suggesting that remote work may not only fragment social bonds but also reconstitute them in new forms (Orlikowski & Scott, 2014a). The central challenge lies in understanding how cultural practices adapt or fail to adapt when mediated through digital platforms.

Management scholarship, in contrast, has approached remote work primarily through productivity, leadership, and policy lenses. Early studies highlighted both advantages and drawbacks of flexible work, showing potential efficiency gains alongside risks of isolation and reduced collaboration (Bloom et al., 2015). More recent research reinforces this ambivalence, indicating that productivity outcomes depend on leadership styles, organisational culture, and policy frameworks (Gibbs, Mengel, & Siemroth, 2021; Bloom, Han, & Liang, 2022). Managers confront a dual imperative: designing systems that sustain high performance while fostering cohesion, trust, and equity across dispersed teams (Contreras, Baykal, & Abid, 2020). Policy-making in hybrid contexts further raises concerns about fairness and inclusion, as unequal access to resources and flexibility may exacerbate existing workplace inequalities (Felstead & Henseke, 2017).

The problem this article addresses is the erosion and reformation of workplace norms and cohesion under remote and hybrid work conditions. The sociological lens illuminates how identity and belonging are challenged or reconstructed, while the management lens examines how leadership practices and organisational policies mediate productivity and cohesion. By integrating these perspectives, the article offers a comprehensive understanding of the cultural and structural dynamics shaping the future of work.

Accordingly, the research is guided by two key questions: First, how does remote work reshape identity and belonging within organisations? This question engages the sociological dimension, focusing on employees' lived experiences, the transformation of organisational rituals, and the role of technology in sustaining or undermining social cohesion. Second, how do leadership



practices and organisational policies mediate productivity and cohesion in hybrid contexts? This question reflects the management dimension, highlighting the influence of decision-making, leadership approaches, and policy frameworks on employee experience and organisational outcomes. This dual lens provides the analytical scaffolding for the article. The sociological perspective foregrounds concepts such as identity, belonging, solidarity, and culture, drawing on classical and contemporary theories of work and society. The management perspective addresses organisational performance, leadership adaptation, and policy design, focusing on their interaction with broader social dynamics. Together, these perspectives underscore that remote and hybrid work involve more than efficiency considerations; they entail profound transformations in how organisations operate as both economic and social institutions.

By integrating sociological and management insights, this article argues that remote and hybrid work necessitates not only logistical adjustments but also deep cultural and organisational change. It suggests that future discussions must consider the interplay between identity and productivity, belonging and performance, and cultural cohesion and structural design, thereby contributing to both theoretical understanding and practical application in the evolving landscape of work.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Sociological Perspectives on Work and Culture**

The sociology of work has long conceptualised organisations as not merely technical or economic entities but also as cultural systems that structure identity, belonging, and social relations. The emergence of remote and hybrid work poses profound challenges to this conceptual framework, as the shift from shared physical spaces to digitally mediated environments has disrupted rituals, norms, and mechanisms of cohesion. A critical engagement with classical sociological theories and contemporary perspectives illuminates both the erosion and reconstitution of workplace culture under these conditions.

### **Workplace Norms, Rituals, and Identity**

Classical sociology laid the groundwork for understanding the cultural and normative dimensions of work. Durkheim's (1997 [1893]) theory of the division of labour argued that modern societies depend on a shift from mechanical solidarity, rooted in similarity, to organic solidarity, based on interdependence. The workplace has traditionally functioned as a site of organic solidarity, where diverse roles are bound together through shared norms and collective rituals. Remote work destabilises this dynamic by dispersing workers spatially, thus weakening the rituals of co-presence, such as shared lunches, informal conversations, and collective celebrations that underpin solidarity (Collins, 2004). In digital environments, solidarity must be sustained through mediated interactions, raising questions about the sufficiency of virtual rituals in maintaining cohesion.

Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical model similarly provides insights into identity construction in the workplace. He conceptualised social life as a performance where individuals present themselves through scripts, roles, and "frontstage" behaviour, reinforced by the physical co-presence of others. In remote contexts, the boundaries between frontstage and backstage blur:



the intrusion of domestic settings into video calls complicates impression management, while the lack of face-to-face cues undermines symbolic exchanges that affirm identity (Mazmanian, Orlikowski & Yates, 2013a). This reconfiguration challenges employees' ability to sustain professional identities and may exacerbate anxieties around visibility and recognition, particularly for women and minority groups navigating stereotypes (Golden, Veiga and Dino, 2008).

Weber's (1978) analysis of rationalisation and bureaucracy further illuminates the transformation of work norms. The bureaucratic order relies on routinisation, clear hierarchies, and codified rules, which historically operated within bounded organisational spaces. Remote work extends bureaucratic rationality into private spheres, embedding surveillance and digital monitoring tools as mechanisms of control (Bernstein, 2017). The paradox of remote work is that while it promises flexibility and autonomy, it simultaneously intensifies managerial oversight through algorithmic tracking, creating new tensions in the rationalised order (Kurland and Cooper, 2002).

Together, these classical frameworks underscore that the workplace is a cultural site where identity and solidarity are constituted through rituals and norms. The shift to remote work disrupts these processes, requiring both workers and organisations to renegotiate the cultural scaffolding of professional life.

### **Belonging, Social Capital, and Cohesion**

Beyond classical theories, sociologists have examined how work fosters belonging and social capital, concepts that are central to organisational cohesion. Belonging involves a sense of inclusion and recognition within a collective, while social capital refers to networks of trust, reciprocity, and shared norms that facilitate cooperation (Bourdieu, 1986; Putnam, 2000a). Workplaces are critical arenas for building bonding capital (within teams) and bridging capital (across departments and hierarchies).

Remote work threatens these processes by reducing spontaneous encounters that nurture weak ties and informal networks. Granovetter's (1973) "strength of weak ties" theory emphasises the importance of casual interactions in generating opportunities, knowledge flows, and innovation. In distributed work, these weak ties are harder to sustain, as employees primarily interact within task-oriented digital platforms. Studies show that remote workers experience heightened isolation and diminished access to informal knowledge-sharing, undermining both cohesion and career advancement (Hinds & Bailey, 2003; Golden, Veiga & Dino, 2008).

At the same time, digital technologies create alternative infrastructures for belonging. Online communities, chat platforms, and virtual events can foster solidarity across dispersed teams (Parker, Knight & Keller, 2020). However, these digital rituals may not fully replicate the affective intensity of co-presence, leading to a partial and uneven experience of belonging. This unevenness is often stratified along lines of gender, class, and race: employees with limited access to digital tools or constrained home environments may find themselves excluded from the dominant culture of remote work (Messenger & Gschwind, 2016; Felstead & Henseke, 2017). Moreover, social capital in hybrid contexts is shaped by organisational policies and leadership practices. Felstead and Henseke (2017) argue that remote work can deepen inequalities between core employees with flexibility and peripheral workers with limited autonomy. Similarly, Golden (2007) finds that the degree of interaction with colleagues



significantly moderates the impact of telework on job satisfaction. Thus, belonging and cohesion are not merely by-products of digital interaction but are actively structured by organisational design and policy.

### **Digital Sociology Perspectives**

The rise of remote and hybrid work has also attracted attention from digital sociology, which explores how digital technologies reshape social life, identity, and culture. Orlikowski and Scott (2014b) highlight how digital platforms act as “apparatuses of valuation,” mediating interactions and shaping perceptions of value and visibility. In remote contexts, workplace culture is increasingly mediated through algorithmic systems, from performance dashboards to video conferencing tools, which structure the rhythms of interaction and visibility.

Digital sociology also emphasises the blurring of boundaries between work and non-work spheres. Wajcman (2015b) argues that digital technologies accelerate the pace of life, creating pressures for constant availability. Remote work intensifies this acceleration, as the absence of spatial boundaries enables work to permeate domestic life. This reconfiguration of temporal norms complicates the work-life balance and raises questions about the sustainability of digital cultures of work.

Furthermore, digital sociology foregrounds the politics of surveillance and control in digitally mediated work. Bernstein (2017) traces the evolution of workplace transparency, noting that digital monitoring transforms observation from episodic to continuous. Remote workers often experience heightened visibility through tracking software yet paradoxically feel less recognised in terms of identity and belonging (Mazmanian, Orlikowski, & Yates, 2013b). This tension between hyper-visibility to management and invisibility to peers illustrates the ambivalent cultural consequences of digital mediation.

Finally, digital sociology points to the emergence of new forms of solidarity and resistance in digital workplaces. Workers have mobilised online to contest excessive surveillance, demand flexible policies, and build alternative communities of support (Spicer, 2020). These dynamics demonstrate that digital technologies not only fragment workplace culture but also enable collective reconstitution in novel forms.

These insights provide the foundation for examining the management literature on productivity, leadership, and policy. By integrating sociological and managerial perspectives, it becomes possible to understand not only the structural outcomes of remote work but also the lived experiences and cultural transformations that underpin them.

### **Management Perspectives on Remote and Hybrid Work**

From a management perspective, the expansion of remote and hybrid work has generated significant debate about its implications for productivity, performance, and organisational governance. Traditional management literature has often emphasised the importance of physical presence and proximity as a means of ensuring accountability, collaboration, and innovation (Mintzberg, 1979). However, the pandemic-induced shift towards flexible work has disrupted these long-established assumptions, requiring managers to reassess how performance is measured and sustained in distributed environments. Empirical evidence on productivity under remote work remains contested. Bloom et al. (2015) found early indications that remote working could increase efficiency through reduced commuting time and greater autonomy over



task completion. More recent studies during the pandemic reinforced these insights, showing that many employees reported higher output and focus while working from home (Choudhury et al., 2020). Yet, the same studies note significant variations across sectors, job types, and organisational structures, suggesting that the productivity outcomes of remote work are contingent rather than universal. For instance, knowledge-intensive roles that require individual problem-solving may benefit, while creative or highly collaborative tasks risk being undermined by reduced face-to-face interaction (OECD, 2021). Leadership adaptation has been central to managing these shifts. The transition away from traditional, hierarchical modes of control towards trust-based and participatory leadership styles has become increasingly necessary (Contreras et al., 2020). Transformational and servant leadership, which emphasise communication, empathy, and the empowerment of employees, have been widely cited as more effective in hybrid contexts (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). At the same time, management has often resorted to digital surveillance and monitoring technologies to maintain oversight of dispersed teams. This tension between fostering trust and exercising control exemplifies a central paradox of remote management (Fay & Kline, 2011). Over-reliance on monitoring can erode morale, diminish creativity, and exacerbate stress, particularly when employees perceive surveillance as an infringement on autonomy and dignity (Moore et al., 2018).

HR policies and organisational governance frameworks have had to adapt accordingly. Companies are increasingly formalising remote work arrangements through codified policies on availability, communication expectations, data security, and health and safety compliance (ILO, 2021). These policies often attempt to balance flexibility with standardisation, ensuring equity between remote and office-based workers while maintaining organisational coherence. Research has highlighted the emergence of a “dual culture” in hybrid organisations, where office-based employees retain greater access to informal networks, while remote workers risk marginalisation (Kirkman & Mathieu, 2005). To mitigate this, many firms have invested in digital collaboration tools, structured virtual socialisation, and intentional culture-building practices (Microsoft, 2021). From a governance standpoint, boards and executives face strategic dilemmas concerning space allocation, investment in digital infrastructure, and long-term workforce planning. The redefinition of workspaces has prompted organisations to rethink not only cost structures but also their symbolic commitment to flexibility and inclusion (Deloitte, 2022). These managerial decisions are increasingly framed as part of a broader employee value proposition, linked to talent attraction, retention, and employer branding in competitive labour markets (SHRM, 2021). Thus, management perspectives on remote work are not confined to operational concerns but extend to strategic considerations of organisational identity and long-term viability.

### **Bridging Sociology and Management**

While sociology and management studies approach remote and hybrid work from distinct angles, their intersection is particularly revealing. Sociological analyses emphasise the transformation of workplace norms, identities, and social bonds, while management literature focuses on productivity, leadership, and governance. The convergence of these perspectives underscores that remote work is not merely a technical or logistical arrangement but a profound social reorganisation of work. The most salient intersection lies in the tension between autonomy and control. From a sociological viewpoint, autonomy in remote work can foster a sense of agency and belonging by enabling employees to integrate work with personal life more fluidly (Mazmanian et al., 2013). Yet, managerial imperatives often push towards reasserting



control through digital monitoring, which risks undermining trust and reinforcing hierarchical asymmetries (Moore et al., 2018). The interplay between these dynamics illustrates how managerial practices directly shape the lived experiences and identities of remote workers.

Trust and surveillance similarly occupy a contested space. Leadership research highlights trust as a critical enabler of productivity and cohesion in virtual teams (Jarvenpaa and Leidner, 1999), while sociological studies warn of the alienating effects of constant surveillance on workers' sense of dignity and solidarity (Foucault, 1977; Sewell & Barker, 2006). The balance between these approaches can determine whether hybrid work cultures cultivate cohesion or reinforce fragmentation. A management lens might emphasise efficiency gains, but a sociological perspective stresses that efficiency without belonging risks hollowing out organisational culture in the long term. The digital mediation of culture provides another bridge between the disciplines. Organisational culture, traditionally reinforced through rituals, shared spaces, and informal interactions (Schein, 2010), now relies heavily on digital technologies. From a management perspective, digital platforms are tools for coordination and productivity; from a sociological lens, they are arenas where identity, status, and group norms are negotiated (Baym, 2015a). For instance, the shift of workplace humour, bonding, and informal conversations into online spaces reveals how organisational cultures are reproduced and contested in digital form. These dynamics carry implications for inclusion, as certain groups may face barriers in engaging digitally, perpetuating inequalities in visibility and recognition (Wajcman, 2020c).

The critical debates arising from this intersection emphasize the importance of seeing remote work as both a managerial challenge and a sociocultural transformation. If management policies overemphasise output metrics at the expense of social cohesion, organisations risk long-term erosion of identity and commitment. Conversely, purely sociological analyses that overlook performance pressures may underestimate the practical constraints managers face in competitive markets. Integrative approaches are therefore needed, combining insights on culture, identity, and belonging with strategies for sustaining performance, innovation, and governance.

### **Remote Work, Identity, and Belonging**

The shift to remote and hybrid work has not only transformed how tasks are performed but has also fundamentally reshaped how individuals construct their professional identities and experience belonging within organisations. Work has historically been a central site of identity formation, providing status, meaning, and social integration (Jenkins, 2014; Sennett, 1998). The digitalisation of workplace interactions has disrupted these processes, challenging traditional modes of recognition, altering the visibility of labour, and creating new forms of inclusion and exclusion. This section examines these dynamics through four dimensions: identity construction, professional invisibility, intersectionality, and digital rituals of belonging.



## **Remote Work and Identity Construction**

Identity at work is not a fixed attribute but an ongoing process negotiated through social interaction (Goffman, 1959). In physical offices, identity construction was historically embedded in daily rituals, dress codes, and face-to-face interactions, where employees presented and negotiated their professional selves. Remote work, by contrast, dislocates these interactions into virtual environments, where identity is mediated by digital tools and communication norms. The camera frame, the virtual background, and the written tone of emails and chat messages become primary resources for self-presentation (Leonardi, 2021). Remote work offers employees both opportunities and challenges in constructing identity. On the one hand, the flexibility of working from home allows greater blending of personal and professional selves, enabling individuals to integrate multiple aspects of their identity (Mazmanian et al., 2013). For example, the visibility of family life during video calls has humanised professional interactions and blurred traditional boundaries between public and private spheres. On the other hand, this collapse of boundaries can complicate identity management, particularly for those who prefer to separate professional and personal domains. The lack of physical cues and spontaneous interaction also limits the ways individuals can signal competence, commitment, and authority, raising questions about how professional credibility is established in digital contexts (Fayard et al., 2021).

Organisations play a central role in shaping these identity dynamics. Managers' emphasis on visible productivity, whether through "green dots" on instant messaging platforms or responsiveness to emails, often places employees under pressure to perform constant availability, which becomes a proxy for commitment (Moore et al., 2018). This has the paradoxical effect of intensifying identity work, as employees continuously curate digital presence to affirm their belonging within the organisation.

## **Professional Invisibility and Recognition**

Recognition has long been a critical dimension of workplace belonging (Honneth, 1995). In co-located settings, recognition was often distributed through informal interactions, spontaneous praise, or visible engagement in meetings. Remote work, however, can exacerbate "professional invisibility," where contributions are less likely to be acknowledged because they occur outside of traditional spaces of recognition. Research suggests that remote workers often struggle to gain equal access to promotions, mentorship, and leadership opportunities compared with their in-office peers (Golden et al., 2008). This invisibility is particularly acute in hybrid models, where office-based employees benefit from "proximity bias," the advantage of being physically present and visible to managers (Choudhury et al., 2020). Such biases create stratified cultures within organisations, undermining cohesion and fueling inequities. Employees who remain remote may feel excluded from informal decision-making and networking, eroding their sense of belonging.

At the same time, digital platforms have generated new arenas of recognition. Visibility through written contributions in chat threads, participation in online communities of practice, or thought leadership on professional social media platforms can enhance recognition in distributed settings (Baym, 2015b). However, these forms of recognition are often unevenly distributed, privileging those with stronger digital literacy or greater confidence in self-promotion. Thus, while remote work has created opportunities for new forms of visibility; it has simultaneously entrenched inequalities in recognition.



### **Intersectionality: Gender, Class, and Race**

The impact of remote work on identity and belonging is not uniform but intersects with existing social hierarchies of gender, class, and race. Intersectionality, as articulated by Crenshaw (1991), highlights how overlapping systems of oppression shape lived experiences. Remote work environments reproduce these dynamics in complex ways.

For women, remote work has been both enabling and constraining. On one hand, flexibility has allowed many women to better balance professional and caregiving responsibilities, reducing the rigid constraints of the “ideal worker” model that assumes constant availability (Chung et al., 2021). On the other hand, research shows that women are more likely to bear the “double burden” of work and domestic labour, with the visibility of caregiving during virtual meetings sometimes reinforcing gendered stereotypes about professional commitment (Power, 2020). These dynamics risk exacerbating gender inequalities in career progression.

Class also shapes experiences of remote work. Professionals with adequate home office setups, stable internet connections, and private space are better positioned to manage the demands of remote work. In contrast, those in smaller or shared living spaces face significant challenges in maintaining boundaries, concentrating, and projecting professional identity online (Felstead & Reuschke, 2021). These disparities highlight how remote work can reproduce broader social inequalities in access to resources and opportunities.

Racial inequalities are also evident in hybrid workplaces. Scholars note that racialised employees often experience greater challenges in achieving recognition and inclusion in digital environments, where microaggressions and exclusion can persist in subtler forms (Gray, 2020). Moreover, the underrepresentation of minority groups in leadership roles means that remote work risks further marginalising these voices in decision-making processes. Thus, intersectional analysis reveals that remote work is not an equaliser but a terrain where inequalities are both reconfigured and reproduced.

### **Digital Rituals and Online Belonging**

Belonging in organisations has historically been reinforced through shared rituals from coffee breaks to team lunches to annual events that created symbolic markers of group membership (Durkheim, 1912/1995). Remote work disrupts these rituals but has also led to the emergence of new digital equivalents. Virtual happy hours, online team-building exercises, and ritualised opening rounds in video meetings represent attempts to recreate cohesion in digital spaces (Collins, 2004). While these practices can foster belonging, their effectiveness varies depending on organisational culture and the willingness of employees to engage. Digital rituals extend beyond formal organisational practices. Informal Slack channels, WhatsApp groups, and memes circulated within teams create symbolic forms of solidarity and humour that help sustain culture remotely (Gibbs et al., 2013). These micro-rituals contribute to the reproduction of organisational identity, providing employees with a sense of shared belonging despite physical separation. However, they can also exclude those less digitally fluent or those who remain peripheral to dominant online cultures. The digital mediation of belonging raises broader questions about the durability of organisational culture. Schein (2010) emphasises that culture is transmitted through shared experiences and tacit understandings, which may be more difficult to reproduce in virtual spaces. Yet, others argue that digital platforms provide new avenues for cultural reproduction, where belonging is continuously negotiated and redefined



(Wajcman, 2020). Thus, digital rituals represent both a continuity and a transformation of organisational belonging.

Hence, remote work has reconfigured the sociological foundations of identity and belonging in organisations. It has altered how professional selves are constructed, reshaped recognition and visibility, and reconfigured inequalities along gendered, classed, and racialised lines. At the same time, it has generated new forms of digital rituals and online belonging, which both enable and constrain social cohesion. For managers, these dynamics highlight that remote work is not simply a technical arrangement but a cultural transformation requiring sensitivity to recognition, equity, and inclusion. For sociologists, remote work offers a critical site for examining how identity and belonging are negotiated in digitally mediated environments. The intersection of these perspectives underscores the need for integrative approaches that address both cultural and managerial dimensions of organisational life in the remote era.

## **ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE IN HYBRID CONTEXTS**

The transition to hybrid work arrangements has fundamentally reshaped organisational culture by altering the routines, practices, and symbols through which cohesion and meaning are sustained. Organisational culture is traditionally maintained through rituals, shared spaces, and informal networks that embed values into everyday activities (Schein, 2017; Alvesson, 2013). In hybrid contexts, however, these practices are fragmented across physical and digital spaces, requiring organisations to reconfigure how they generate belonging, manage power dynamics, and reinforce shared identity. This section examines three critical domains: the transformation of rituals and informal networks, the reconstitution of onboarding practices and hybrid rituals, and the challenges posed by surveillance and digital Taylorism.

### **Transformation of Rituals, Cohesion, and Informal Networks**

Rituals have long been central to organisational life, providing symbolic reinforcement of values and shared identity (Durkheim, 1995; Trice & Beyer, 1984). In office-based environments, practices such as team lunches, informal hallway conversations, and shared celebrations function as cultural anchors that sustain cohesion. The hybrid workplace, however, dilutes these interactions. Employees attending virtually are often excluded from spontaneous exchanges, creating disparities in access to social capital (Putnam, 2000c). Informal networks, vital for collaboration, mentorship, and career advancement become harder to sustain, with research showing that remote workers may experience “professional invisibility” (Golden, 2021).

Digital tools such as Slack, Teams, and Zoom have emerged as substitutes for in-person interactions, but these often prioritize efficiency over social bonding (Leonardi, 2021). While virtual coffee chats and online social events attempt to replicate physical rituals, their effectiveness is limited by “Zoom fatigue” and the lack of embodied co-presence (Mazmanian et al., 2013). As a result, organisations face the risk of fragmenting into parallel cultures: one centered around the office and its informal networks, and another around digital spaces with looser ties (Kellogg et al., 2020).



## **Onboarding and Hybrid Rituals**

Onboarding new employees presents challenges in hybrid contexts. Traditionally, induction into organisational culture has relied on immersive exposure to shared norms, face-to-face mentoring, and symbolic rituals that communicate “how things are done here” (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). In hybrid environments, these processes must be mediated through digital platforms, which can limit tacit learning and cultural immersion. New employees risk being socialized into “thin cultures” that emphasize technical tasks over relational belonging (Kane et al., 2022).

To address these gaps, organisations have experimented with hybrid rituals that blend online and offline elements. For instance, structured digital mentoring programs, ritualized welcome sessions via video conferencing, and gamified onboarding platforms attempt to reinforce identity and cohesion (Meister, 2021). Yet such approaches raise questions about authenticity and sustainability. While hybrid rituals can provide symbolic markers of inclusion, their scripted nature may undermine spontaneity and genuine bonding (Collins, 2004). Thus, organisations must carefully balance digital efficiency with opportunities for informal, unscripted interactions that foster deeper cultural integration.

## **Surveillance and Digital Taylorism**

A major cultural challenge in hybrid contexts is the rise of surveillance technologies, often described as “digital Taylorism.” With the shift to remote work, many organisations have deployed monitoring software that tracks keystrokes, online presence, and productivity metrics (Moore, Upchurch & Whittaker, 2018). While justified as mechanisms to ensure accountability, such practices reshape organisational culture by fostering distrust and eroding autonomy. The shift reflects a revival of scientific management logics in digital form, where employees’ labor is fragmented, measured, and controlled through algorithmic oversight (Braverman, 1974).

From a cultural standpoint, surveillance undermines trust, signaling that employees are objects of suspicion rather than partners in organisational goals (Ball, 2010). This dynamic weakens cohesion by creating an environment of anxiety and resistance, which can damage engagement and commitment (Moussa, 2021). Moreover, digital monitoring tends to privilege quantifiable metrics over qualitative contributions, thereby marginalizing relational work, emotional labor, and creativity that are harder to measure but essential to culture (Fleming, 2019).

At the same time, not all forms of digital monitoring are perceived negatively. Some employees view dashboards and transparent metrics as tools for coordination and fairness (Bernstein, 2017). The cultural impact, therefore, hinges on how surveillance is framed and enacted: as a tool of control or as a mechanism for empowerment and clarity. Leaders who frame monitoring in terms of collective goals, while maintaining transparency and boundaries, can mitigate cultural harms.



## **Productivity, Leadership, and Policymaking**

The rapid transition to hybrid and remote work during and after the COVID-19 pandemic has prompted extensive debate over its implications for productivity, leadership, and organisational policy-making. While management research often emphasises efficiency and output, a more holistic analysis considers the interplay between performance, social cohesion, and employee well-being. This section examines three interrelated dimensions: the contested evidence on productivity, leadership challenges in hybrid teams, and policy dilemmas in promoting flexibility, fairness, and global applicability.

### **Mixed Evidence on Productivity**

Empirical research on productivity in remote and hybrid contexts presents a complex and nuanced picture. Early studies suggested that telework could enhance performance by reducing commuting time, minimizing workplace distractions, and providing employees with greater autonomy over task execution (Bloom et al., 2015). Subsequent studies during the pandemic corroborated some of these findings, showing that remote workers often report increased focus and efficiency, particularly in knowledge-intensive sectors where individual output is easily quantifiable (Choudhury, Foroughi & Larson, 2020).

However, productivity gains are not uniform across industries or demographic groups. Sectors requiring intensive collaboration, creative problem-solving, or client-facing interactions often experience diminished outcomes when face-to-face engagement is limited (OECD, 2021). Furthermore, hybrid models, which combine remote and in-office work, introduce coordination challenges. Teams must navigate asynchronous communication, fragmented schedules, and inequities between employees who spend more time in the office and those who are predominantly remote. “Proximity bias” can exacerbate these disparities, giving office-based employees greater access to informal networks, mentorship, and career-enhancing opportunities, thereby indirectly influencing productivity outcomes (Choudhury et al., 2020).

Moreover, the relationship between productivity and well-being must be considered. While some employees thrive under autonomy, others experience blurred work-life boundaries, digital overload, and “Zoom fatigue,” all of which can impair performance over time (Wang et al., 2021). Consequently, productivity in hybrid and remote work settings is contingent not only on task characteristics but also on the quality of leadership, communication practices, and organisational policies that support employee resilience.

### **Leadership in Hybrid Teams**

Effective leadership is central to managing hybrid teams, where the absence of physical co-presence challenges traditional notions of authority, supervision, and motivation. Contemporary management literature emphasizes the importance of trust, communication, and fairness in sustaining performance and engagement (Contreras, Baykal & Abid, 2020). Leaders must cultivate trust without relying on constant surveillance, striking a delicate balance between oversight and autonomy. Trust-based leadership has been shown to enhance both employee satisfaction and output, fostering a sense of psychological safety necessary for creativity and collaboration (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999). Communication is a critical component of hybrid leadership. Leaders must ensure that information flows transparently and inclusively across digital platforms, preventing the formation of isolated subgroups and



avoiding the marginalisation of remote employees (Leonardi, 2021). Structured practices such as regular check-ins, clearly defined roles, and standardized reporting mechanisms can reduce ambiguity and enhance coordination. However, excessive monitoring or rigid protocols risk undermining trust, reinforcing hierarchical distance, and creating a perception of control rather than support (Moore, Upchurch & Whittaker, 2018).

Fairness is another central leadership challenge. Hybrid arrangements can unintentionally privilege certain employees, typically those with easier access to office facilities, advanced digital literacy, or pre-existing informal networks over others. Leaders must actively mitigate these inequities through equitable task allocation, recognition practices, and access to development opportunities (Golden, 2021). Failure to do so can erode morale, weaken team cohesion, and compromise both productivity and employee retention.

Leadership in hybrid contexts also intersects with sociological dimensions of identity and belonging. Leaders who attend to the social and cultural needs of teams by facilitating informal interactions, fostering inclusion, and recognising diverse contributions can reinforce organisational identity even in dispersed settings (Parker, Knight, & Keller, 2020; Contreras, Baykal, & Abid, 2020). This highlights the interdependence of managerial effectiveness and the maintenance of a cohesive organisational culture.

### **Policy Challenges: Flexibility, Well-Being, and Global Differences**

The design of organisational policies to support hybrid work is a complex undertaking. Flexibility is widely regarded as a core advantage of remote work, yet policies must navigate the tension between adaptability and operational coherence. Clear guidelines on availability, communication expectations, and performance evaluation are necessary to ensure that flexibility does not devolve into ambiguity or inequity (ILO, 2021).

Employee well-being is an equally critical policy consideration. Hybrid work can reduce stress associated with commuting and enhance work-life integration, but it can also increase mental load and the risk of burnout (Chung et al., 2021). Policies that promote wellbeing such as encouraging scheduled breaks, limiting after-hours communications, and providing mental health resources are increasingly recognized as integral to sustaining productivity in the long term (OECD, 2021). Global organisations face additional policy challenges due to cultural, legal, and infrastructural differences. What constitutes acceptable work hours, privacy protections, or digital surveillance practices can vary widely across jurisdictions. Multinational corporations must reconcile these differences while maintaining coherent policies that safeguard fairness, trust, and operational effectiveness (Deloitte, 2022). The pandemic highlighted these challenges, as employees in different countries experienced widely divergent conditions of remote work, with implications for both engagement and performance.

Moreover, policymaking in hybrid contexts must account for technological disparities. While some organisations provide advanced collaboration tools and ergonomic support, others assume employees have access to private workspaces, high-speed internet, and digital literacy, which can exacerbate inequalities in both productivity and professional development (Felstead & Reuschke, 2021). Effective policy design, therefore, requires a nuanced understanding of structural inequities and proactive measures to create inclusive and supportive work environments.



Taken together, these dynamics illustrate the interdependence of managerial and sociological perspectives in understanding remote work. Productivity cannot be divorced from considerations of identity, belonging, and inclusion, and policies that neglect cultural and social dimensions risk undermining both performance and cohesion. Hybrid work thus represents a profound transformation of organisational life, requiring integrative strategies that harmonize operational effectiveness with human-centric values.

## **FUTURE OF WORK: INTEGRATING SOCIOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT**

The ongoing evolution of hybrid and remote work presents both opportunities and challenges for organisations seeking to harmonize operational efficiency with human-centric values. The future of work requires the integration of sociological insights focusing on identity, belonging, and cohesion with management imperatives of productivity, leadership, and policy-making. This integrative perspective emphasizes three interrelated priorities: balancing autonomy and control, implementing hybrid models that enhance results, and fostering inclusive, resilient organisational cultures.

### **Balancing Autonomy and Control**

A central tension in hybrid work is the balance between employee autonomy and organisational control. Sociological research highlights that autonomy contributes to identity formation, professional satisfaction, and organisational commitment, while excessive monitoring can erode trust and cohesion (Honneth, 1995; Baym, 2015). Management scholarship, by contrast, stresses the need for oversight, performance measurement, and accountability, particularly in dispersed teams (Moore, Upchurch & Whittaker, 2018). Future hybrid arrangements must reconcile these perspectives by designing systems that support autonomy while ensuring transparency and accountability. Approaches such as flexible scheduling, asynchronous work, and self-directed task management empower employees to manage their workflow while maintaining organisational objectives (Choudhury, Foroughi & Larson, 2020). Leaders play a pivotal role in this balance, fostering trust through clear communication, outcome-focused evaluation, and equitable recognition of contributions. Achieving this equilibrium reduces the risk of professional invisibility, reinforces belonging, and supports sustainable productivity.

### **Hybrid Models and Results-Oriented Work Environments**

Emerging hybrid models increasingly prioritize output over presence, exemplified by Results-Only Work Environments (ROWE). In such frameworks, employees are evaluated based on deliverables rather than physical location or hours logged, offering significant flexibility and promoting work-life integration (Moen et al., 2016). ROWE and similar models align with sociological insights about identity and agency, allowing employees to integrate professional and personal selves while maintaining organisational engagement. However, the transition to results-oriented hybrid models is not without challenges. Ensuring clarity of goals, equitable distribution of resources, and consistent performance evaluation requires robust policy frameworks and culturally sensitive leadership (Deloitte, 2022). Organisations must also account for potential disparities in digital literacy, home workspace resources, and social capital, which may influence an employee's capacity to thrive in remote or flexible arrangements (Felstead & Reuschke, 2021). Thus, implementing ROWE or hybrid frameworks



necessitates both technological infrastructure and a deliberate culture of support and inclusivity.

### **Building Inclusive and Resilient Cultures**

The future of work demands that organisations cultivate cultures that are both inclusive and resilient. Sociological research underscores the centrality of belonging, recognition, and social cohesion in sustaining engagement, particularly in digitally mediated environments (Goffman, 1959; Collins, 2004). Management research complements this by highlighting how culture influences performance, innovation, and retention. Hybrid and remote work challenge traditional cultural transmission, requiring organisations to consciously embed values, rituals, and informal networks in both physical and digital spaces (Schein, 2017).

Inclusive culture-building involves addressing intersectional inequalities related to gender, race, class, and digital access. Organisations must proactively design mentorship programs, equitable recognition systems, and accessible communication channels to prevent marginalization of remote or underrepresented employees (Crenshaw, 1991; Golden, 2021). Resilient cultures, by contrast, prioritize adaptability and psychological safety, equipping teams to navigate uncertainty, technological change, and fluctuating market conditions. Leaders and HR professionals must collaborate to embed these values in policies, practices, and digital platforms, ensuring that organisational identity remains coherent even in dispersed contexts.

### **CONCLUSION**

The shift to hybrid and remote work represents a fundamental transformation of organisational life, reshaping both social dynamics and management practices. From a sociological perspective, remote work affects identity, belonging, and cohesion by altering the daily interactions, rituals, and informal networks that sustain organisational culture. Employees navigate new forms of professional visibility and recognition, while digital platforms mediate inclusion, social capital, and relational dynamics. Factors such as gender, social class, and cultural background further influence how employees experience identity and belonging, highlighting the nuanced ways in which workplace culture is constructed in dispersed environments.

From a management perspective, hybrid and remote work presents complex challenges for productivity, leadership, and policy-making. Evidence on performance outcomes is mixed, reflecting differences across sectors, tasks, and team structures. Effective leadership in hybrid contexts requires fostering trust, clear communication, and fairness, while mitigating inequities between remote and in-office employees. Policy-making must balance flexibility, well-being, and global considerations to ensure practices are sustainable, inclusive, and effective. Well-designed policies support employee autonomy, reduce burnout, and maintain organisational cohesion, while poorly implemented frameworks risk undermining engagement and productivity.

Integrating sociological and management perspectives highlights the interdependence of human-centric and operational priorities. Hybrid work challenges traditional assumptions about control, visibility, and cohesion, requiring organisations to balance autonomy with



accountability. Results-oriented approaches, which focus on outcomes rather than presence, can empower employees and promote work-life integration, while intentional cultural practices, such as digital rituals and equitable onboarding, reinforce social cohesion and a sense of belonging. Together, these strategies underscore the importance of combining human and organisational considerations in designing effective hybrid work environments.

The insights from this analysis offer both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it deepens understanding of the interplay between identity, culture, and performance in digitally mediated workplaces. Practically, it provides guidance for leaders and policymakers seeking to foster inclusive, resilient, and productive organisations. Future research should explore the long-term effects of hybrid work on career development, organisational culture, and social cohesion, as well as the impact of intersectional and global differences. Investigating the effectiveness of specific digital rituals, leadership practices, and policy interventions will provide actionable insights for organisations navigating the evolving work landscape.

In conclusion, hybrid and remote work is more than a logistical adaptation; it constitutes a sociotechnical reconfiguration of organisational life. Success in this new era depends on integrating understanding of identity, belonging, and culture with effective leadership and policy strategies, creating workplaces that are efficient, inclusive, and adaptive to the challenges of the modern world.

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