



Evaluating Remote Work Practices in the Public Sector: Insights from Saudi Arabian Employees

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ABSTRACT

Remote work is a work pattern adopted in various organizations as an advancement of technology and an application of digital transformation. Remote work has many advantages that contribute to both employees and organizations. It allows flexibility and increases productivity besides many other benefits. However, remote work also has some challenges such as culture and reachability that need to be considered. Remote work is a significant change in employees' pattern of work where they will have more autonomy and responsibility. Additionally, employees will be more reachable and they might work longer hours. Thus, all of this might contribute to substandard practices of remote work where its stereotype becomes negative. Literature has shown that some organizations have decided to return to office as a result of the substandard practices. Therefore, this research is motivated to understand the practices of remote work in Saudi Arabia's public sector. This research found that the public sector relies heavily on technology. However, as a formal work pattern, only three organizations allow remote work. That said, employees become reachable more than ever when they are asked and contacted after working hours. This has resulted in a new finding that remote work might not be an official work pattern, but employees could work remotely after official working hours. This research has also found that the practices of remote work are substandard. Employees' culture is behind and they misuse the concept of remote work. In addition, there is a lack of remote work policy which leaves a space for individuals and subjective decisions that might contribute negatively to remote work experience.

KEYWORDS: Employees, Remote work, Technology, Information system

Introduction

A new era has been brought about by the development of digital technology, which made it necessary for businesses of all sizes and sectors to go on revolutionary journeys (Omol, 2024). Lockdowns that were imposed made everyone reconsider how they lived and worked, attempting to preserve or at least resemble the preexisting patterns where the virtual world appeared to be a smart choice in both cases. (Rupcic, 2024). As a result, during the lockdown, remote work increased significantly in several countries (Siddika, 2023). The success of remote work environments has been greatly influenced by technological improvements, which have made it possible for seamless task management, communication, and collaboration (Ng et al., 2022; Naysmith and Samuelsson, 2024). The new normal as a result is working from home or remotely (Buheji and Ahmed, 2020; Davidescu et al., 2020; Siddika, 2023; Wang et al., 2021).

This type of work improves work-life balance by reducing their commute time can devote more time to their hobbies, family, and personal interests thus, increased employee happiness (Rupcic, 2024). Organizations are witnessing a digital transformation toward hybrid work arrangements (Jaß et al., 2024). Soto-Acosta (2024) showed that although remote work and hybrid work allow organizations to better use their resources especially when it comes to flexibility, they bring a set of challenges such as leaders' management style, communication norms, and employee burnout. Consequently, it should be noted that transformation is more about people than it is about technology (Frankiewicz and Chamorro-Premuzic, 2020). Indeed, Information technology (IT) gains significance through human use (Petani and Mengis, 2023). Thus, this transformation

is not simply technological; it is an organizational and cultural revolution that alters the fundamentals of how businesses operate (Omol, 2024).

As an information system (IS) research, it should be noted that organizations invest a high amount of money in such technologies, but they are not giving sufficient importance to people. This could mean organizations in the long term are losing the cost of such investment with no return. Additionally, this also means that organizations might not capture the best value of remote work. Finally, this could have negative consequences on both organizations and employees. These are all reasons that make it significant to explore such a phenomenon. To the author's best knowledge, there is inadequate research investigating the area of remote work from an IS perspective. Thus, this research objective is to explore the practices that are followed on remote work and the impact that might have on employees, and therefore the organizations. It should be noted that this research used the phrase remote work whether it is hybrid or complete remote work. The objective can be achieved by answering the following research questions:

RQ1: How remote work is utilized in Saudi Arabia's public sector?

RQ2: How have the current practices of remote work influenced employees?

This paper is organized as follows. The next section draws attention to literature that discusses different areas of remote work, and research gaps and engages with theory. This is followed by the methodology section where the research shows the applied method for both data collection and analysis. The third section discussed the findings of this research and how it



responds to the research gap and theory. Finally, the conclusion, which summarizes the research, shows its limitations, future research, and implications for policy and practice.

Literature review

Hybrid workplace implementation is drawing increasing interest from scholars and practitioners alike (Hasbi and van Marrewijk, 2024). The ability to work both online and physically simultaneously in multiple locations has increased due to technological advancements (Petani and Mengis, 2023; Siddika, 2023). Many organizations still provide remote or hybrid working options even after lockdowns and other restrictions have been lifted (Rupcic, 2024). Technology-enabled flexible work practices, such as hybrid working models, have gained widespread adoption and greater acceptance among employers and employees since the global pandemic (Radonić et al., 2021; Siddika, 2023). This is because some employers noticed that these practices would lead to both organizational development and productivity (Davidescu et al., 2020; Siddika, 2023).

For example, flexible work schedules and remote work alternatives are common features of hybrid workplace models (Radonić et al., 2021; Siddika, 2023). Flexible work options, according to Austin-Egole et al. (2020); Siddika (2023), can increase employee performance and facilitate work-life balance by lowering stress levels, absence rates, and employee turnover. In addition, on days when they worked from home, employees reaped numerous benefits from not having to commute as they were able to save time by starting work early in the morning and finishing it right away in the evening, giving them more time for personal activities (Jaß et al., 2024). Indeed, employees are better able to manage work and family obligations when they have the chance to save time and fulfill their obligations (Siddika, 2023). In addition, they will be able to save the money they would have to pay for transportation (Siddika, 2023).

The foundation of this skill is the employee's digital literacy, or their capacity to locate, assess, produce, and share information using digital technology (Deschênes, 2024). Additionally, management trust is essential to this hybrid work paradigm because it encourages employees to accept responsibility for their tasks when they feel that they can handle their work without continual supervision (Naysmith and Samuelsson, 2024). Indeed, (Jaß et al., 2024) show that employees wanted more autonomy, trust, and accountability when it came to choosing their workspace, handling work-related responsibilities, and managing their time, as long as they effectively accomplish the predetermined goals. That said, this journey is anything from simple, it necessitates a profound comprehension of the complex interactions between technology, culture, leadership, and strategy (Omol et al., 2023; Omol, 2024). As this form of working includes advantages, it also includes challenges (Rupcic, 2024). Organizations worldwide face new challenges as a result of the combination of traditional office settings and virtuality ones (Stich, 2022).

One of the biggest challenges is communication, as remote workers often feel alone or split off from their employers

and colleagues (Petitta and Ghezzi, 2023; Naysmith and Samuelsson, 2024). Indeed, lack of communication confirmation from others caused difficulties in coordinating, which in turn led to insecurities over their work results (Jaß et al., 2024). While there were digital means of contact, colleagues were not always accessible, and some reported that there was a barrier to impromptu conversations because not all team members utilized the video conferencing software's availability status features (Jaß et al., 2024). Due to many factors, including a lack of collaboration (Dale et al., 2024; Tsipurskey, 2023), numerous organizations are currently opting for return-to-office mandates over flexible options (Knight, 2024; Dale et al., 2024). Organizations and employees must cooperate to make sure that hybrid work has a positive impact (Dale et al., 2024; Knight, 2024). Therefore, it seems that employees might not have responsibilities as well as insufficient support for the features and duties that they should have and do, where organizations might not capture the advantages of remote working and return-to-office mandates.

Another challenge that needs to be overcome is cultural opposition to change (Omol, 2024). Learning cultures are rarely developed on their own and instead need management's assistance, direction, and control utilizing available resources, and other forms of support when required (Rupcic, 2024). For organizations, the move from office-based work to either full- or partial-time remote work was not a straightforward one, particularly for individuals without previous expertise (ILO, 2020; Siddika, 2023). This indicates that need for organizations support to such a transformation. Indeed, the established corporate culture that encourages adaptability in work and communication, as well as the organizational support offered for these goals, determine the degree of happiness that impact such a challenge (Rupcic, 2024). Therefore, it can be argued that remote working changes the culture and mindset of employees, and it needs support where can both organizations and employees maximize the benefits of remote working.

Another challenge is the preparations that employees have in their homes. It was criticized that businesses lacked ergonomic equipment, particularly for home offices, and employees have no legal claim to appropriate office supplies or related compensation (Jaß et al., 2024). Additionally, when employees worked from home, they had issues with internet connectivity because employees had to set up WiFi connectivity at home based on their availability and capability, while there was dedicated internet connectivity in the office work structure (Siddika, 2023). Thus, this raises an important question of whether employees should pay for preparing the infrastructure that they need to work from home. Naqshbandi et al. (2024) show that physical autonomy does not significantly affect how well employees perform at work, and one explanation for this might have to do with disruptions and diversions that happen at home, such as subpar supplies and uncomfortable workstations. This indicates that working from home requires preparation that helps employees to have an environment that helps them to be productive, and not simply just work from home.



Another challenge, employees reported a lower threshold for the arrangement and a significant increase in the number of (digital) meetings as a result of hybrid and digital options (Jaß et al., 2024). Additionally, there was a propensity for meetings to happen more haphazardly, interfering with ongoing work as coworkers or bosses might call on the spur of the moment or arrange meetings without warning (Jaß et al., 2024). employees' working hours were extended because jobs could be completed online, and therefore, employees were frequently given assignments even beyond office hours (Siddika, 2023). This leads to the question of whether hybrid working has impacted employees to be unpaid compared to pre-pandemic work schedules due to being available online at any time (Stich, 2022).

Thus, work-family conflict is expected to increase in hybrid settings if organizations do not implement appropriate safeguards to protect employees from incongruous work schedules, which will be exacerbated by the growing "work anytime" trend (Stich, 2022). Employees would feel under pressure to be available at all times as a result (Afota et al., 2023; Ancona et al., 2021; Stich, 2022). There have been concerns raised regarding the "work intensification" trend, which may encroach on personal time as the boundaries between work and life grow more blurred (Ancona et al., 2021; Kelliher et al., 2019; Naysmith & Samuelsson, 2024; Stich, 2022). Managing boundaries is one of the main issues since workers find it difficult to draw boundaries between their personal and professional lives (Kelliher et al., 2019; Naysmith and Samuelsson, 2024; Senarathne Tennakoon, 2021). Research shows that employees feel socially disconnected while they are digitally connected where they are highly stressed (APA, 2017; Issa, 2022).

The above challenges could be a trigger that remote working might lead to job burnout. The majority of industries have contributed to issues like burnout due in large part to digital fatigue and the overflow of work-related activities into personal time and space (Gratton, 2021; Rupic, 2024).

According to research, employees' behaviors have evolved to stay connected 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, taking advantage of the flexibility and autonomy that technology has provided which has led to tensions within the workforce (Kokshagina and Schneider, 2023). Indeed, the extensive use of digital technologies increases the workload, technostress, and physical strain among employees, which can lead to digital transformation failure (Issa, 2022; Nadeem et al., 2024). Technostress makes information communication technology (ICT) users more tense, which in turn makes them less satisfied with their jobs (Khedhaouria et al., 2024). The fact that perceived techno-stressors from excessive ICT use in remote work settings rather than variables like marital status and parental status are the main predictors of technostress and strain among remote workers (Khedhaouria et al., 2024).

“Technostress describes the stress that users experience as a result of application multitasking, constant connectivity, information overload, frequent system upgrades, and consequent uncertainty, continual relearning and consequent job-related

insecurities, and technical problems associated with the organizational use of ICT” (Tarafdar et al., 2010, p.304). The social and material aspects of technology are inextricably entwined, a fact that information technology fails to adequately understand (Petani and Mengis, 2023). It is mainly unknown how hybrid work at scale will affect employees and organizations (Dale et al., 2024). Consequently, it is critical to comprehend the intricacy of the motives for hybrid work from the viewpoint of the employee (Knight, 2024). Originations that have put people first have demonstrated resilience when it comes to challenges (Soto-Acosta, 2024). Organizations can buy almost any technology, but the capacity to adjust to a more digital future rests on creating the skills of the next generation, bridging the talent gap, and maximizing the potential (Frankiewicz and Chamorro-Premuzic, 2020). Inadequate organizational digital skills, a lack of organizational commitment, and poorly planned processes can all contribute to the failure of digital transformation (Bughin et al., 2021).

High job burnout or poor job performance are examples of technostressors that contribute to technostrain which is a major question in information systems (IS) research and practice (Pflügner et al., 2024). Such a viewpoint is clearly in contradiction with IS research, which is concerned with how people use IT in their daily jobs (Orlikowski, 2007; Petani and Mengis, 2023). The concept of affordances which appears in work practices from the organizational interaction between people and IT infrastructures was considerably explored in the IS literature (Carlile et al., 2013; Lindberg and Lyytinen, 2013; Petani and Mengis, 2023).

Among IS researchers, affordance theory has been increasingly popular as a means of reintroducing materiality into our comprehension of organizations (Fayard and Weeks, 2014; Wang et al., 2018). The discipline of ecological psychology gave rise to affordance theory (Bawa, 2024). The theory goes back to Gibson (1977) who points out that the affordance theory is distinguished from others when it comes to value and meanings and supports the idea that everything has the potential to either help or hurt someone depending on the they are perceived. In other words, instead of viewing an object as a collection of attributes that are inherent to the object and independent of the actor, a goal-directed actor views an object in the environment in terms of how it can be used—that is, what it “affords” the actor in terms of action possibilities for achieving that goal. Moreover, these affordances do not require cognitive evaluation of object attributes and characteristics because they are directly observed if they are perceived at all (Volkoff and Strong, 2018).

Later, the theory was used in human-computer interaction to examine the relational and functional aspects of technology (Tripodi et al., 2024). Affordance theory shines when using it as a lens through which to examine a range of IS subjects (Volkoff and Strong, 2018). Indeed, Affordance theory is expanded upon in IS to investigate how technology facilitates user interaction and goal-oriented behavior and how this results in the achievement of predetermined objectives (Bawa, 2024;



Evans et al., 2017; Klecun et al., 2016; Strong et al., 2014; Wolff-Piggott and Rivett, 2016). Researchers can better understand the interaction between technology and human actors by using the affordance lens (Wang et al., 2018). To put it another way, affordance does not dictate how people will use technology, but materiality limits the potential applications of technology (Stendal et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2018). The theory has been used in a similar context by Duan et al. (2024) as a lens where the theory is applied in investigating how digital technology might be used in digital work to improve job performance. Thus, in the context of this research, the phenomenon is not about technology or the actor, rather it is about the relation between the actor and the technology itself, and what technology affordance is to employees (the actors) about the goal which is remote work.

Overall, the growing prevalence of remote work in public administration signifies a significant organizational transformation process that offers difficulties for both employers and employees (Jaß et al., 2024). Moreover, a large portion of the more recent study has been published with an emphasis on performance and results rather than employees (Dale et al., 2024). Knight (2024) additional research endeavors could investigate variables that impact the overall satisfaction such as the degree of autonomy in hybrid work environments and the intensity of hybrid work, and the ways that personal circumstances or demographics affect people's experiences with rewards and obstacles. Thus, this research argues that there are more areas to be explored when it comes to remote work and employees.

Methodology

This research is concerned with the employees and the phenomenon of remote work. This requires a deep understanding of how employees feel and their perception toward this phenomenon where a qualitative approach is deemed appropriate. Qualitative research is interpretive and comprehensive; it explores the opinions and perspectives of the participants in depth while reflecting and expanding the nuanced picture of a given topic or circumstances (Billups, 2021). In social studies, qualitative research is becoming more and more prevalent. Frequently, interviews serve as the sole or primary basis for this (Alvesson, 2023). Through the use of qualitative interviews, researchers can collect rich data from a purposefully selected sample of people

who have firsthand experience with the phenomenon of interest to better understand the phenomenon and how it is understood, experienced, and interpreted (Connelly and Peltzer, 2016). This research utilizes the use of in-depth interviews through interviewing 22 participants. They are all employees and represent eight different organizations in Saudi Arabia's public sector. In terms of access, it is gained through multiple gatekeepers. Additionally, document analysis, which is one of the fundamental techniques in qualitative research (Darlington and Scott, 2022), was also utilized as another method of data collection. Documents from a variety of sources, both internal and external, can be used as secondary data (Zikmund et al., 2010). In this research, internal documents only were collected to demonstrate the policies related to remote work. This supports the use of methodological triangulation, which is a practice of combining more than one method, given that it is recommended as best practice (Lewis et al., 2014). It is believed that the use of methodological triangulation increases the quality of qualitative research. Research analysis, the thematic analysis is used as the data analysis method of this research which is a method that has gained popularity as a tool for qualitative data analysis (Terry et al., 2017). Clarke and Braun (2017, p.297) define thematic analysis as a method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (themes) within qualitative data. This research utilized this definition in steps that were followed to analyze the data. First, the researcher started to identify patterns in data, which are the transcripts that were transcribed after each interview, that can be classified together. Next, the data is analyzed by understanding how participants agreed or disagreed on different aspects of the study's phenomenon. This allows the researcher to better understand data, and then be able to define and review themes accordingly. Once themes are identified and reviewed, this allows the researcher to interpret data with the findings and discussions, and therefore, contribution. Lastly, this research follows various ethical considerations and gained ethical approval from the committee of Taif University.

Findings and Discussion

In this section, the data that were collected are reposted and discussed. Overall, the analysis of the data has resulted in three main themes and ten sub-themes as can be seen in Figure (1).

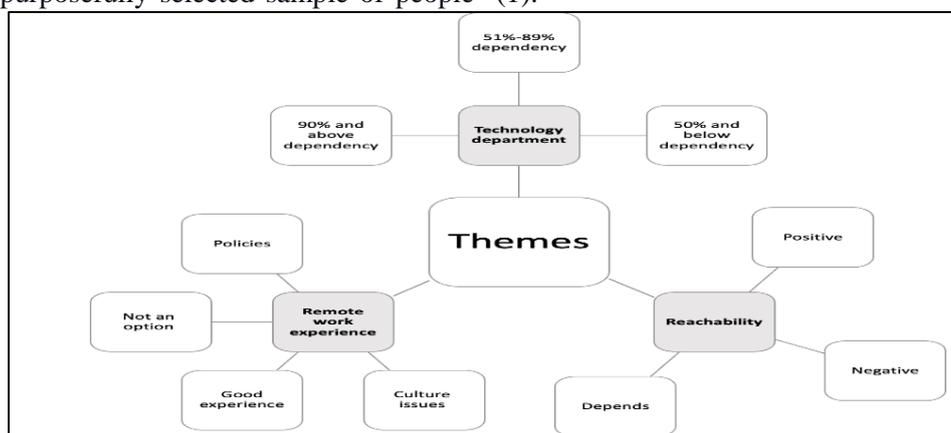


Figure 1: themes and subthemes that were extracted from data, own figure



The remaining section goes into extensive detail about each theme and how it responds to literature and contributes to the field.

Technology dependent

This theme has shown that the public sector in Saudi Arabia relies significantly on technology. Participants have shown that their work relies mainly on technology. For example, Participant BBM has said.

“ I would say the nature of work depends on technology for more than 90%”

Another participant FIT has also claimed that

“It is fundamental; we don’t use papers anymore”

Almost all participants demonstrated that their work is technology-dependent. Therefore, this shows two key points. First, technology is no longer a luxury, it is essential that organization better use their resources. The public sector in Saudi Arabia has shown the intensive use of technology which shows the importance of such a phenomenon to be studied and explored to ensure that the best practice is implemented. Second, it can be argued that such an advancement in technology in the public sector could mean clearer procedures for remote work knowing that technological advancement has enabled the ability to work remotely (Petani and Mengis, 2023; Siddika, 2023). As a consequence, employees and infrastructure are all prepared to enable remote work. However, while technology is becoming in use more and more, there is an important point to be considered which is reachability. The next sub-section discusses reachability in more depth.

Reachability

As the public sector in Saudi Arabia is investing more and more in technology, it means more technology applications impact employees’ lives including remote work. A key point that is raised during the interviews is reachability. However, what is interesting is how different employees perceive reachability. For example, participant RAK claimed that

“ It is positive... I would say there is a balance “

In the same vein, participant VICE said

“ It is positive... It has not impacted my personal life at all. ”

Consequently, those participants believe that reachability is positive and has not impacted their lives negatively. However, others have seen reachability as something negative. Participant SGV said that

“... in a negative way, I’m working eight hours, and work these days is very demanding, I want my family and my home, but I need to disconnect which helps me to get the other day ready. My manager is texting me on WhatsApp during the night. ”

Similarly, participant SNG said

“ We are more reachable today and this is seen in a negative way especially getting calls and working out the working hours. ”

Participant AMJ argued that employees are exploited by technology.

“ I would say we reach a stage where the employees are exploited, I work eight hours when I need to go to my family, and this causes me an issue, and it also affects me the next day, I might not come or will not be productive”

As a result, participants have shown that technology allowed managers to contact their employees to complete some tasks or even ask them about knowing that they have access to some platforms or emails. That said, others believe that reachability can be both positive and negative. For example, participant EMM said that

“ It depends sometimes we want to get things done even after the formal hours, but sometimes it could impact our social life. ”

In the same vein, BNG said

“ It can be seen from positive and negative ways, from work perspective, it is positive, but from a social point of view, it can be negative as they are connected to work all the time which impact their social life”

Participants have shown that the overall concept of being reachable is positive. However, when more time is allocated to work then it might become negative. A possible explanation is that some others believe it can be both negative and positive, but employees themselves have to take action. One example is participant SSN who said

“ It depends on the person and also about the sensitivity of the department where you have to get things done even if it is out of the working hours... I controlled this and protected my work life as well as my personal life”

Another example is participant BBW.

“ I would say negative and positive, the negative part is little, but we suffer from those who send out of the working hours, and they are not anyone, they are leaders, but mostly positive. I don’t get annoyed, I also have a private number so if I get messaged outside of the workhours, I can easily ignore them”

Similarly, participant SNG said

“ It depends on the person him/herself, having optimal balance is impossible so it is important to have plans for your time”

Thus, this explains that employees need to take action to increase the balance between their work life and personal life where they can reduce the negative impact of reachability. Finally, there is another pattern in data which is reflecting manager’s perspective. For example, participant ASMC said

“ It is a difficult one, but I have to say as manager, and in a position that is close to his excellence “the minister”, we need to be quick and reachable all the time as we mostly deal with urgent requests. As an employee, I have to say that technology has impacted my personal life significantly, even on holidays, I cannot disconnect. People think it is only a WhatsApp message, so why don’t you just respond to it, so it is politics?”

In the same vein, participant HKMC said



“ I would say negative and positive. As a manager, I could get in touch with my employees anytime including out of working hours and weekends. However, I also get annoyed getting messages or calls outside of my working hours, but I have adapted this by not answering calls or messages outside of my working hours, so it is positive and negative and how you deal with it.

Therefore, it can be argued that managers find themselves in a position where they have to contact their employees outside of work hours so they can finish their tasks and report to those who are higher in the hierarchy. However, they know that it is not healthy for them, because they as employees become annoyed when they are contacted. Figure (2) shows a summary of how positive and negative reachability is affecting employees.

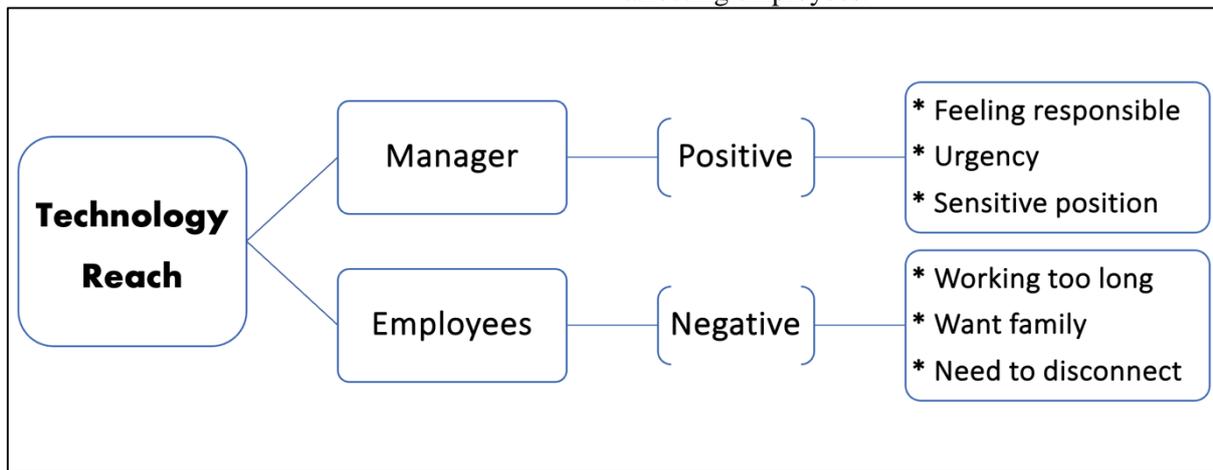


Figure 2: employees’ emotion toward reachability, own figure

Overall, this sub-section has highlighted different patterns that are believed to be worth noting. Technology allows employees to be reachable when they are contacted outside of work hours to be asked about different tasks. This is mostly seen as a negative pattern. Literature showed that managing boundaries is an issue, as it is difficult to draw boundaries between their personal and professional lives (Kelliher et al., 2019; Naysmith and Samuelsson, 2024; Senarathne Tennakoon, 2021). It is also known from the literature that job burnout is increased as a result of digital fatigue and the overflow of work-related activities into personal time and space (Gratton, 2021; Rupcic, 2024). Thus, ICT users become more tense which in turn makes them less

satisfied with their jobs (Khedhaouria et al., 2024). where the extensive use of digital technologies increases technostress which can lead to digital transformation failure (Issa, 2022; Nadeem et al., 2024). However, data showed that employees are partly responsible for limiting and managing their time. Data showed different practices such as having two phones (one personal and another for work), and not responding outside of work hours. However, it also has a political angle, as not responding to messages could mean management might take it personally and might impact promotions, holiday requests, and so on. As a consequence, this can become a real dilemma for employees Figure (3).

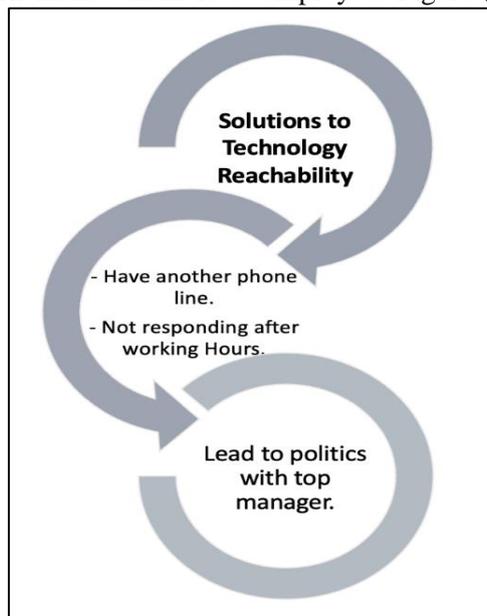


Figure 3: employee’s dilemma for reachability, own figure



This research also argues that there is a need for better policies that protect both employees and employers when it comes to reachability. Indeed, literature has illustrated clearly that if organizations do not implement appropriate safeguards, then it is more likely that work-family conflict is expected to increase (Stich, 2022).

Remote work

This sub-theme discusses data findings and discussion when it comes to remote work. Data has shown that among eight different organizations only three of them have the option for employees to work remotely. Participants were asked directly whether or not could work remotely. Participant EMM said

“ Yes, it is enabled, and now we can attend meetings remotely”

Participant NML also said

“ Yes, we could work remotely since COVID. Two-thirds of our ministry work remotely, and it has become a way of living.

Whereas participants at ASMC said that they can work remotely up to two days a week.

“ We have the option to work remotely. But you cannot work remotely more than two days a week and five days a month. However, it is all subject to your manager's approval”

Similarly, participant SGV said

“ Yes, we have the option to work remotely up to two days a week.”

Therefore, this shows that remote work exists today in Saudi Arabia’s public sector although it might be limited to certain days/hours. However, when participants were asked to provide documents (e.g., policies) where it illustrates employees’ rights and duties while they are working remotely, only one organization had a policy. The policy is a document of ten pages that is written for both employees and managers. It has different elements covered which are what it means by remote work, targeted work, date for remote work, software that is available remotely, infrastructure needed, location, time, collaboration, telephone, and meeting tools, and finally procedures of remote work. The next table (1) summarizes the policy.

Elements	Explanation
Definition of remote work	The ability of employees doing their duties using technology as an option to maintain work. It should be noted remote work does not mean it is a holiday, and employees are not allowed to leave their cities where they work.
Targeted work	All administrivia and not administrivia work that can be completed remotely.
Date for remote work	From his Excellency’s (the minister) order until receiving the opposite.
Software available	Six internal platforms
Infrastructure	PC/laptop, phone, internet, email, username
Location	Home
Duration	Six hours from 8 am to 2 pm Note: hours can be different when needed for specific jobs.
collaboration, telephone, and meeting tool	Teams for collaboration Cisco Jabber for telephone extensions and meetings.
Key procedures	Employees might be asked to attend to the workplace. Ensure data security, and report immediately for data loss. Ensure having security software. Being available and complete tasks within time. Employees are subject to the same policies except attending to the workplace. Human recourse to distributes and ensure the application of this policy. Information technology to ensure technical and security support. Managers to distribute work daily and equally. Supervisors to monitor employees’ performance through reports. Supervisors to help collaboration between employees and support them. Managers and employees to be available daily on the app, and not giving instructors/orders verbally as possible. Employees use Teams to meet. Supervisors to be responsible to inform staff about meetings.

Table 1: a summary of the policy document, own table

The document has some key elements that were covered. For example, they highlighted the fact that remote work is not a holiday, it is clear that is a consequence of substandard practices that were noticed. Additionally, they have highlighted that employees cannot leave the city where they work even if they work remotely. They did not explain the reason behind that. However, employees might be asked to attend to the workplace when needed. Another thing to be highlighted is infrastructure. It was not clear whether it would be provided by the organization or the employees. It was also noticed that the location is home, and therefore, this raises the question of what if the employees

wanted to work remotely from where else. In terms of the hours, it is not clear when it can be different and to who. Key procedures wise, it covers almost what is needed and it shows the different roles and responsibilities. Finally, a good thing was noticed in the policy that technical support is available 24/7. Overall, it is a good practice that the organization has a policy. However, more clarification is needed as if the policy is not well developed, it leaves a space for subjectivity and individual understanding and explanation.

The other organizations have norms when it comes to remote work which could potentially risk the experience of



remote work. For example, participant SFH showed a culture issue when it comes to remote work.

“I would say negative, it has to be during official hours, and honestly, when the staff works remotely there are some disadvantages for example, I can call the staff and they don't respond, so the communication can take time not as if we are all in the same place/time.”

In the same vein, participant BBW said

“When we are remote working, you send emails or on the platforms, you get no response, even if you call or text someone, they say we are remote-working or sorry we haven't seen it, so they consider themselves in a day off.”

Participant PHI has also shared a similar concern.

“I'm worried that the concept of remote working becomes a holiday, the entity needs to monitor staff attendance and productivity before this becomes a phenomenon.”

Thus, this shows a clear sign that there is a cultural issue as the employees might not use to remote work, and therefore, with the absence of policies, the concept is misused. Literature showed that communication and lack of collaboration are crucial where colleagues were not always accessible, and some reported that there was a barrier to impromptu conversations because not all team members utilized the video conferencing software's availability status features (Jaß et al., 2024). Additionally, learning cultures are rarely developed on their own and instead need management's assistance, direction, and control utilizing available resources, and other forms of support when required

In the same vein, participant NML said

“I would say it is very positive because the circumstances of individuals are different, some have traffic congestion, so it gives flexibility, this also includes the weather as well... The productivity in remote work has risen and we have KPIs. Each employee finds to him/herself an environment where they could become productive, whether home or café”

Similarly, participant SGV said

“Most of my colleagues prefer to work remotely where they can be with their family and wear comfortable clothes.”

Even those organizations who do not have the option of remote work believe that there is value in having this option. For instance, participant RAK said

“We don't have this option yet. It depends on the staff, personally, I say remote working is better, you are comfortable, better quality, and away from working issues”

Similarly, participant SNG said

“We don't have remote working, but it is important to have it and to have flexibility, employees' performance is measured by productivity not how many hours that they have worked”

It is clear that the awareness of employees in Saudi Arabia's public sector is high and able to perceive the value that

(Rupcic, 2024). Therefore, besides regulations, organizational support is a must as employees are not used to such a work pattern and can work with more autonomy. Participant ASMC has explicitly shown that the concept is misused.

“In terms of the culture, I would say around 40 to 50% of employees misuse remote work, they might be available remotely but there is no productivity, and takes longer time to get things done, so I would they treat remote work as a holiday.”

Indeed, participant SFH said

“I would say it is not ready yet, people think remote working is off”

Therefore, this research argues that with the absence of policy, remote work is in danger. This negative point of view about remote work, and employees' practice of not being productive could lead to a gap in the concept of remote work. This gap could mean that remote work is banned where its value is lost as a consequence of not being well governed. Indeed, the literature showed that due to many factors, including a lack of collaboration (Tsipurskey, 2023), numerous organizations are currently opting for return-to-office mandates over flexible options (Knight, 2024). Participant HKMC has shown that.

“I would say we are not ready; we need more governance to illustrate all aspects that related to remote work” Remote work as illustrated in the literature review is an added value in various aspects. For example, participant SSN argued.

“It is very effective; I would say my productivity is even more as you are comfortable in your home”

could be added. However, the misuse and the cultural issues might be a result of not regulating the remote work as well as the modernity of the concept.

One participant raised a concern regarding remote work and the fact that there are a lot of missing answers when it comes to remote work. Participant ASMC claimed

“For example, who is responsible for securing the device and network for the employees, is it part of the contract? The same applies to insurance, if you get injured during remote work, do you get the insurance cover because you are working? So we still don't have the answers and this all needs to be reflected on contracts. I don't have an answer but this needs to be illustrated in the contract or HR policies. The issue the policy we have is not approved yet, so we acutely don't have something written and approved yet”

Thus, the issue of remote work is not limited to cultural issues, it is also related to questions such as who pays for home office (e.g., PC, and internet connection), insurance, and so on. This was discussed in the literature as employees have no legal claim to appropriate office supplies or related compensation for home offices (Jab et al., 2024). As a result, this needs an urgent response from policymakers as well as researchers to study such questions and be able to provide answers that may resolve the current gap.



Another pattern found is that remote work for a certain group of people. For example, participant HKMC said

“ We have remote working, but it is very limited to a certain group of people such as technical support. Another thing is the meetings, almost now all our meetings become online”

This shows that some organizations might have remote work but that is limited to a group of employees that their nature of work may allow them to do so.

The last pattern that was found is that remote work might be limited to weather conditions or specific circumstances. For instance, participant EDUM said

“ In my sector, we work remotely in certain conditions”

In the same vein, participant PHI said

“ The remote-working is born during an emergency and my entity kept it in this way, so during Covid or weather conditions”

Therefore, it can be seen that there are organizations that only enable remote work where there is a danger of attending the workplace where it is shifted remotely.

Together these results provide important insights into the concept of remote work by identifying four types of organizations when it comes to remote work (figure 4). Data showed that there are organizations that have the option to work remotely, but that is limited to certain days. Another group of organizations is those that enable remote work for certain groups of employees such as technical support. Finally, those organizations which enable remote work during emergencies such as extreme weather conditions. Thus, this confirms what has been discussed in literature when it comes to the increase of remote work as a result of technological advancements (Petani and Mengis, 2023; Siddika, 2023), or after lockdowns and other restrictions have been lifted (Rupic, 2024).

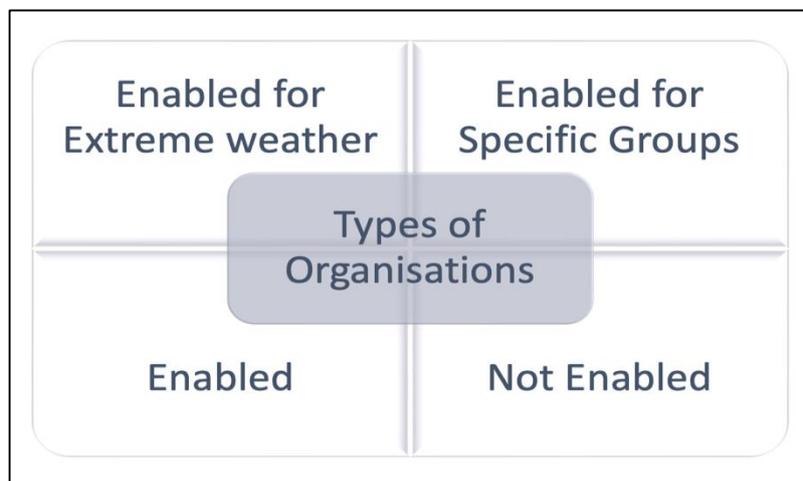


Figure 4: types of organizations in remote work, own figure

However, while there are different patterns of remote work, there are still some organizations that do not enable remote work. Participants overall have shown that remote work is an added value where they can have flexibility, work around

families, increase productivity, stay away from work issues, reduce traffic congestion, and enable KPIs (figure 5). Indeed, flexible work schedules are a common feature of hybrid workplace models (Radonić et al., 2021; Siddika, 2023).

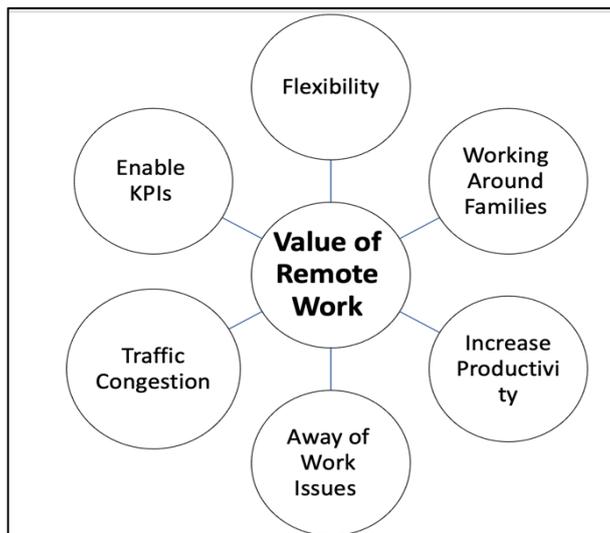
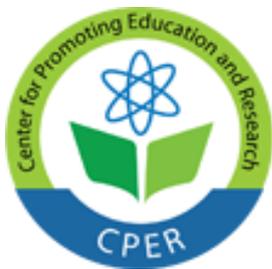


Figure 5: remote work value, employees' perspective, own figure



That said, data has also shown that remote work has two main issues which are culture and policy (figure 6). Employees misuse the concept of remote work as part of the culture, so while they are working remotely, they do not respond to messages, and calls, or their productivity is low. While this does not represent all employees who are working remotely, it could

lead to a stereotype that remote work is not effective. The fact that remote work is not regulated is a key reason for this misused practice. Only one authority out of eight has a policy about remote work, all other organizations regardless of their patterns of remote work have no policy. Although this authority has developed a policy, there are unclear points to be covered.

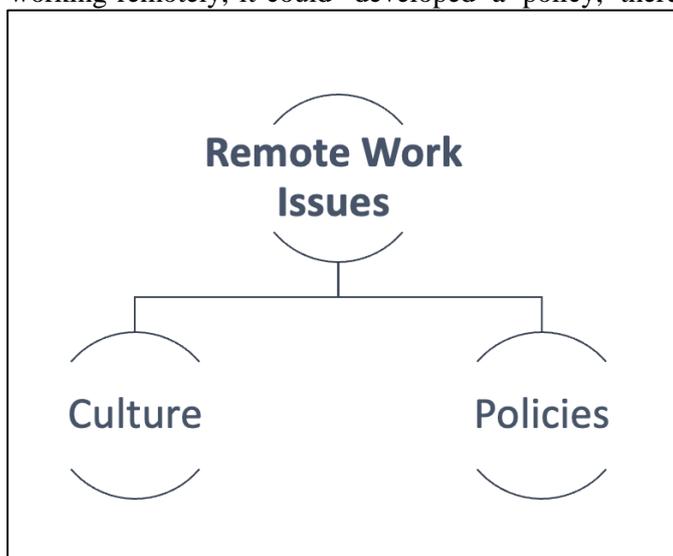


Figure 6: remote work issues, own figure

Literature has shown that the journey is anything from simple as it requires a profound comprehension of the complex interactions between technology, culture, leadership, and strategy (Omol et al., 2023; Omol, 2024). Thus, remote work must be regulated so that both employees and organizations can make use of technology and create a positive experience toward the concept.

Contribution

In answering RQ1, this research found that remote work is not utilized as it should be in Saudi Arabia’s public sector. Although the theme of *Technology dependence* showed that the sector relies heavily on technology, the minority of organizations’ sample have remote work. Even those who have remote work are restricted to certain days and hours, and subject to manager approval as shown in theme *remote work*. That said, this research argues that it is not necessarily that organizations need to have remote work as almost all employees receive tasks outside of the working hours remotely. The study contributes to our understanding of remote work by adding that remote work is not necessarily to be enabled formally. Thus, employees might be working remotely while this pattern of work is not enabled in their organizations. Showing theme *reachability*, employees have reported the fact they are contacted outside of working hours. Additionally, managers have admitted that they have no choice but to reach employees remotely due to their responsibilities, positions, and urgency. On the other hand, employees are feeling working too long, away from family and not disconnected from work. Employees have shown that the only solution have found is that they have a different phone/line or not responding to messages. However, this has also put them in a real dilemma where it might upset the top management, and therefore affect

them negatively when it comes to promotion, holidays, and so on. Thus, this is a serious find of where this needs to be regulated.

In answering RQ2, it is clear that through the discussion of *the remote work* theme the current practices are insufficient. First, only one authority out of eight has a policy to regulate remote work. Second, the culture of remote work is not yet there. The concept is misused by employees who are not responding or being productive while they are working remotely. Third, not all organizations have taken advantage of remote work as only three of them have this pattern enabled. Other organizations have not enabled this pattern of it is enabled partly either for specific groups or extreme weather. This shows that current practices are substandard and lead to a negative experience and stereotypes about remote work. Therefore, this means employees might lose the value that remote work offers such as flexibility, working around families, and traffic congestion issues. Organizations might also lose productivity and KPIs that are enabled through remote work. Therefore, it can be argued that the current practices impact both employees and organizations negatively. Moving forward, there is a need for stronger policies to regulate remote work. Additionally, employees have been working for many years in a fixed workplace, and under supervision, this requires a cultural change where organizations need to better support employees and such a transformation.

In terms of the theoretical discussion, it was discussed in the literature review section that Affordance theory is used to examine a range of IS subjects (Volkoff and Strong, 2018), and investigate how technology facilitates user interaction and goal-oriented behavior and how this results in the achievement of predetermined objectives (Bawa, 2024; Evans et al., 2017;



Klecun et al., 2016; Strong et al., 2014; Wolff-Piggott and Rivett, 2016). In this research, the theory was crucial to understanding what technology affordance is to employees, who are the actors, about the goal which is remote work. It was clear that the goal has not been achieved, as technology as a tool has not been used by the actor to achieve the supposed which is

remote work. Instead, it was used to take advantage and achieve different goals that the actors have such as spending time with family. This research contributes through a model inspired by the Affordance theory. The model shows that actors have a tool to be used to achieve a goal (figure 7).

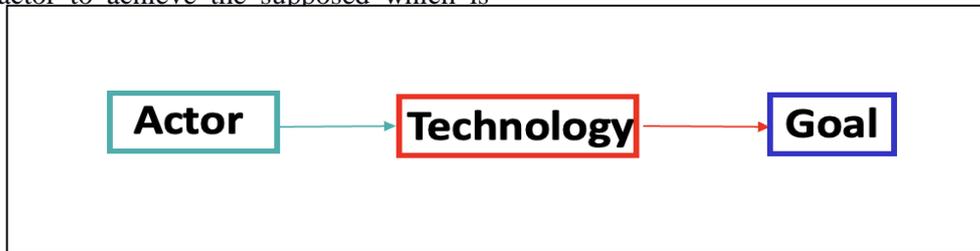


Figure 7: visualisation of Affordance theory, own figure

In the context of remote work, it is supposed that employees use technology to achieve remote work and therefore, the added value (e.g., productivity, flexibility, etc), (figure 8).



Figure 8: remote work currently, own figure

However, this research assumes that actors have the motive the achieve this goal until they realize different actions that technology can afford, and therefore, their goals become changed when the actual goal is not achieved. Employees who misused remote work have utilized technology as a way to remote work, and therefore, the absence of the workplace. While

they are on remote work, they do not respond or be productive which assumes that they busy doing personal work (e.g., sleeping, being with family, traveling, doing groceries, etc). This is all part of immature culture as well as the absence of policies (figure 9).

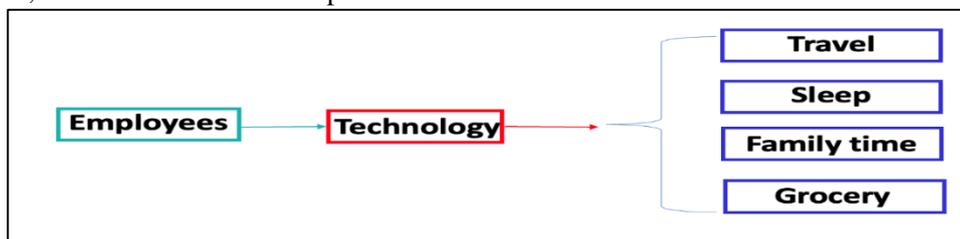


Figure 9: remote work misuse, own figure

Therefore, this research argues that in the stage between actors and technology, policies need to be present so that employees can know their rights and duties. However, the policy needs to be well-developed and does not leave space for individual explanations. In addition, between the technology stage and the

goal stage, organizational support needs to be present so that it can fill the gap, and complement policies, and therefore build a culture that supports remote work. Therefore, it is believed this model is optimal for remote work (figure 10).



Figure 10: remote work optimal model, own figure

However, it should be noted that this model is in its infancy where it needs to be applied to different public sectors and different countries to evaluate whether it has pointed to the root cause of remote work issues, and can better visualize remote work.

Conclusion

Remote work is a pattern of work that has obtained the interest of both researchers and practitioners. This research has shown that remote work is not fully enabled formally in Saudi Arabia’s public sectors as only three out of eight sectors have

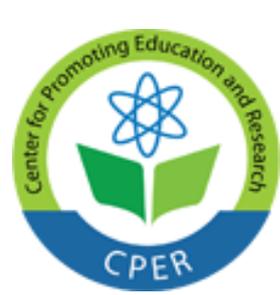


this pattern of work. However, this research shed new light on remote work by arguing that remote work doesn't need to be enabled formally in organizations to claim that they have remote work. This research argued that almost all organizations are working remotely, especially after working hours. This has increased the reachability to employees who have reported their concerns about not being able to disconnect. When it comes to the practices of remote work, it was found that remote work is not well promoted and regulated. Thus, it has caused issues in a culture where employees misuse remote work. Additionally, the absence of policy has increased the issue as employees do not know their rights and duties. Although one authority has developed a policy, there are missing elements that need to be

covered. Therefore, it is important to understand that remote work should not be enabled unless it is regulated and supported by organizations so that the culture can be adapted. In terms of the limitations, this research is limited to the public sector of Saudi Arabia and therefore, it is believed that increasing the sample could help to better understand and generalize the phenomenon. In addition, the framework is in its infancy and therefore, it needs to be applied more so that it can be validated. Future work-wise, it is important to have the perspective of organizations so that it can be understood what management is doing for remote work. It is also important for practitioners to ensure that policies reflect remote work when it comes to both duties and rights.

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