

Why Are so Many Remote Workers Reluctant to Endure the Politics of Organizational Culture?

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A recent Wall Street Journal (WSJ) article dated May 31, 2023, titled “Why Workers Aren’t Coming Back to the Office Full-Time” (Smith & Carpenter, 2023), examines reasons employees prefer remote work, such as rising childcare costs, avoidance of micro-management, low interpersonal conflict, wardrobe requirements, food costs, commute time, and parking expenses. The WSJ has recently published multiple articles on remote work, including one on January 11, 2024, stating “Remote Workers Are Losing Out on Promotions, New Data Shows” (Chen, 2024), which claims remote workers were promoted 31% less frequently than office workers. Understanding the politics of organizational culture related to remote work preferences is crucial. We conducted a literature review using Google Scholar with key terms “remote work” and “office” OR “politics” OR “culture” from 2019 to 2023, including the COVID-19 pandemic period. There is a pressing need for a cultural shift within organizations to adopt remote and hybrid work models, driven by professionals' increasing demand for remote work options.

Keywords: culture, compensation, politics, remote work, scientific management, Taylorism, turnover

FREDERICK W. TAYLOR’S INFLUENCE ON ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Frederick Winslow Taylor (1911) is the third pillar of the classical management perspective [along with Henri Fayol and Max Weber], contributing to the rise of the field of management (Bell & Martin, 2012; Kanigel, 2005; Schachter, 2010). As a pioneer, Taylor (1911) showed a visual depiction of a “fine workman” in late 19th Century and early 20th Century America and how a devoted manager builds organizational culture around the duties and burdens of his principles. Some authors are of the impression that Taylor was a product of his era, and that the views he held about human capital were forged by the beliefs and values of that era, especially regarding the politics of race; his safety at times required armed security protection from angry mobs (Bell & Martin, 2012; Gabor, 2000; Nelson, 1980; Nelson, 1995).

Taylorism had extreme political and cultural influences on the *Task Work* that laborers would [or could not] accept as piece-rate, particularly Hungarian, German and Black laborers (Nelson, 1995; Tylor, 1911). Taylorism remains an integral part of modern business work processes (Bell, 2011). An excerpt from an article on ResearchGate titled, *My Chat with ChatGPT Regarding Black Laborers’ Influence on Frederick W. Taylor’s Principles of Scientific Management, May 3, 2024*, by Bell (2024) shows the effects of Taylor’s managerialism on organizational culture, within the context of the late 19th Century and early 20th Century.

Bell (2024, pp. 1-3) describes the tension between highly-skilled Black laborers and Taylor’s “Task Work” system that is exemplified further in Black people’s fiction surrounding the notion of a H.N.I.C. Table 1 illustrates the sentiments of commonality and the legacy of highly skilled Black laborers in that era.

TABLE 1
DEPICTION OF THE BLACK LABORER IN RELATION TO SCIENTIFIC MANAGEMENT

<p>“Taylorism is known as that method described by Taylor as a sort-of “personal productivity coefficient” (Bell & Martin, 2012). The task Taylor put before himself was to usher in higher levels of organizational surplus with more efficient techniques of work in motion (Gabor, 2000); nonetheless, laborers had a different take on Taylorism, and their collective sentiments were demonstrated by controlling the flow of work, thus the flow of output, which Taylor himself described as ‘soldiering;’ this type of group communication in the collective voice pitted Taylorism against laborers’ interests (Nelson, 1980, Nelson, 1995). For laborers the rapid improvement in efficiency meant that dramatic changes in workmen’s outputs were akin to them immolating themselves on the altar of scientific management. Completing work too soon meant no more work! Taylor seems to dispute modern interpretations of his organizational analyses with his own words about the culture with which he dealt rate for ‘task work.’”</p> <p>“Figure 1 shows pages 71 and 72 from Principles of Scientific Management (Taylor, 1911) that highlights language that is perhaps the most elucidating facts depicting Taylorism and the characteristics of the workers, with Black American men working as “bosses” and “teachers,” that led to Taylor’s breakthroughs in job analysis and design. What good is any scientific method without keen observations? It is apparent that highly-skilled Black men were a source of his keen observations. Principles of Scientific Management continues to be the bedrock of modern manufacturing processes, job analysis and design, and quality control.”</p> <p>“Taylor bragged about the Black men he was observing as ‘the finest body of picked laborers,’ which contributed to the development of the principles of scientific management. His sentiment is unambiguous and clear. He contrasted Black laborers against the 19th and early 20th Century stereotyped ‘nigger drivers’ which is exemplified by the clichéd language found in the clip from the movie <i>Lean On Me</i>, where Morgan Freeman (school ‘Principal’) and Robert Guillaume (district ‘Superintendent’) engaged in a tug-of-war verbiage, both depicting themselves as the exemplar H.N.I.C.—Head Nigga In Charge!”</p>	<p>“The fictional movie clip from March 3, 1989 which punctuates the stereotype “nigger driver” unfolds with:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Actor Robert Guillaume (Superintendent) exploding: “GET USED TO IT—IT’S THE WAY OF THE WORLD. If you’re so hot on discipline—then Got dammit! START BY ACCEPTING MINE!! Cause contrary to popular opinion—I AM THE HEAD NIGGA IN CHARGE!!!”</p> <p>Fiction informs reality but reality instructs fiction. Certainly, the clichéd H.N.I.C. existed decades prior to the <i>Lean On Me</i> (1989) movie, and it is easy to surmise that the “finest body of picked laborers” Taylor described was that same underlying sentiment which punctuated Black male competence depicted throughout the movie. Because, after their fierce verbal scuffle, Superintendent and Principal retreated to their masculine humanity, and the scene ended with the boss (Superintendent) inviting the reprimanded Principal to lunch, in a comforting lowered tone ‘Come on, let’s get something to eat.’ Similar to the respect between men portrayed in movie, Taylor (1911, p. 72) too observed that “it would have been absolutely impossible for anyone to have stirred up strife between these men and their employers.”</p> <p>“Taylor also discovered early the workers’ behavior of ‘soldiering’ that social psychologists today describe as social loafing (Bell & Kennebrew, 2023; Bell & Rahman, 2023; Gabor, 2000). Taylor observed that ‘A careful analysis had demonstrated the fact that when workmen are herded together in gangs, each man in the gang becomes far less efficient than when his personal ambition is stimulated...”</p>
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FIGURE 1
PAGES 71 AND 72 FROM FREDERICK WINSLOW TAYLOR'S PRINCIPLES OF
SCIENTIFIC MANAGEMENT

<p align="center">THE PRINCIPLES OF SCIENTIFIC MANAGEMENT 71</p> <p>The question which naturally presents itself is whether an elaborate organization of this sort can be made to pay for itself; whether such an organization is not top-heavy. This question will best be answered by a statement of the results of the third year of working under this plan.</p> <table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th align="center"><i>Old Plan</i></th> <th align="center"><i>New Plan Task Work</i></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>The number of yard laborers was reduced from between 400 & 600 down to about</td> <td></td> <td align="center">140</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Average number of tons per man per day</td> <td align="center">16</td> <td align="center">59</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Average earnings per man per day</td> <td align="center">\$1.15</td> <td align="center">\$1.88</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Average cost of handling a ton of 2240 lbs.</td> <td align="center">\$0.072</td> <td align="center">\$0.033</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>And in computing the low cost of \$0.033 per ton, the office and tool-room expenses, and the wages of all labor superintendents, foremen, clerks, time-study men, etc., are included.</p> <p>During this year the total saving of the new plan over the old amounted to \$36,417.69, and during the six months following, when all of the work of the yard was on task work, the saving was at the rate of between \$75,000 and \$80,000 per year.</p> <p>Perhaps the most important of all the results attained was the effect on the workmen themselves. A careful inquiry into the condition of these men developed the fact that out of the 140 workmen only two were said to be drinking men. This does not, of course, imply that many of them did not take an occasional drink. The fact is that a steady drinker</p>		<i>Old Plan</i>	<i>New Plan Task Work</i>	The number of yard laborers was reduced from between 400 & 600 down to about		140	Average number of tons per man per day	16	59	Average earnings per man per day	\$1.15	\$1.88	Average cost of handling a ton of 2240 lbs.	\$0.072	\$0.033	<p align="center">72 THE PRINCIPLES OF SCIENTIFIC MANAGEMENT</p> <p>would find it almost impossible to keep up with the pace which was set, so that they were practically all sober. Many, if not most of them, were saving money, and they all lived better than they had before. These men constituted the finest body of picked laborers that the writer has ever seen together, and they looked upon the men who were over them, their bosses and their teachers, as their very best friends; not as nigger drivers, forcing them to work extra hard for ordinary wages, but as friends who were teaching them and helping them to earn much higher wages than they had ever earned before. It would have been absolutely impossible for any one to have stirred up strife between these men and their employers. And this presents a very simple though effective illustration of what is meant by the words "prosperity for the employé, coupled with prosperity for the employer," the two principal objects of management. It is evident also that this result has been brought about by the application of the four fundamental principles of scientific management.</p> <p>As another illustration of the value of a scientific study of the motives which influence workmen in their daily work, the loss of ambition and initiative will be cited, which takes place in workmen when they are herded into gangs instead of being treated as separate individuals. A careful analysis had demonstrated the fact that when workmen are herded together in gangs, each man in the gang becomes far less efficient than when his personal ambition is stimulated; that when men work in gangs, their</p>
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Bell (2024, p. 8) concluded, after his chat with ChatGPT regarding the influence Black laborers had on Taylor's *Principles of Scientific Management*, that:

Because modernity broadly teaches that America is systemically racist, by mistake AI refers to it as "scientific racism," it might be impossible for ChatGPT at this time to discern that any 19th Century intellectual might well have genuinely believed the Black laborers were "finest body of picked laborers" and were in fact superior workmen, as Frederick W. Taylor (1911) described on page 72 of his book, Principles of Scientific Management. Taken from his book, Intellectuals and Races, Thomas Sowell argues that late 19th Century Black people and White people were getting along; Black people were doing financially better than recent White immigrants; and it was liberal policies that eroded race relations (Sowell, 2023).

I am not certain the ChatGPT could consider the truth value of Taylor's claim about Black laborers' superior skills. It was not demonstrated that Taylor's claim was untruthful. Taylor was born in 1856 to a wealthy Quaker family in Philadelphia, PA; therefore, it is a hard-fact of history. For some reason ChatGPT was unable to integrate this fact. Quakers were a branch of Christianity that fought for the abolition of slavery. Numerous Quakers were lynched or hanged for their beliefs. Taylor was a Quaker and his core values were molded in him by his mother [Emily Annette Taylor (née Winslow)] and father [Franklin Taylor] who were prominent abolitionists, and his mother was also rumored to have participated in the Underground Railroad (Curtis, 2011). Psychologists believe that a child's core values are formed by age 13. Religious conviction is a significant predictor of moral choice (Bell et al, 2011).

It appears more likely than not that Taylor was genuine in his praise of Black laborers. It is unlikely that Taylor was much different in his core moral values than his Quaker mother and father. It is likely that ChatGPT would have tailored its response to Taylor's Quaker ancestry and Thomas Sowell's input had I introduced it as a question. (p. 8)

Why Is Taylorism Relatable to a Remote Work Era?

In the late 19th Century and early 20th Century, there was no such thing as remote work via electronic means for laborers. The laborers' work was persistently grueling; the culture was stern (Braverman, 1998; Kanigel, 2005); the workers engaged in the act of soldiering to prevent job loss and mitigate against what they perceived as a threat to their livelihoods—the *Scientific Management Principles* of Taylorism (Gabor, 2000; Nelson, 1980; Nelson, 1995; Schachter, 2010; Taylor, 1911). Despite race and cultural politics, there is direct video evidence supporting Sowell's (2023) claim that Black and White laborers worked in harmony in Philadelphia, as truly depicted in the silent film footage of the men working with molten metal at the Midvale Steel plant in 1919 (African American steelworkers, Midvale Steel, Philadelphia, circa 1919). Taylor proved that work output at Bethlehem Steel could be increased six times the rate and workers felt threatened. Tensions ran extremely high among the laborers and Frederick W. Taylor; it is like being a fly-on-the-wall when reading Gabor's (2000, p. 3) account:

The focus of Taylor's experiment was the immigrant laborers themselves—Hungarian and German—whose job it was to haul bars of pig iron weighing ninety-two pounds each onto the railroad cars. For two days, Taylor and two deputies observed ten men as they lugged bars of pig iron from the Bethlehem Steel yard to the railcars. Laboring at a backbreaking pace, Taylor's ten 'Hungarians' each loaded an average of seventy-five tons of pig iron per day, nearly six times the previous rate.

On the basis of those observations, Taylor established a production quota. To complete a fair day's work, he determined, each worker would have to haul forty-five tons per day—an output level still about three times as high as the average output before Taylor appeared on the scene. To be sure, Taylor offered to pay the men who met the quota a higher wage. But to the Bethlehem laborers, Taylor was asking too much. In the ensuing weeks it became clear that some of the men were physically incapable of meeting the quota. Others simply refused to try. Either way, the Bethlehem workers lost their jobs by the dozen. By some accounts, Taylor was so deeply hated by the men that he had to walk home under armed guard for fear of an attack on his life. (p. 3)

Taylor clearly established that managers have a duty and a burden to define the work of employees (production quotas) and monitor and correct the output generated from skilled work. Exemplary work should be rewarded with higher incentives. Poor performers will be eliminated. Modern managers' concern about the new remote worker era is an inability to control the production quotas, accurately monitor and

assess the output, and appraise performance of the remote worker. According to Boone and Bowen (1980, pp. 35-36) there are four main duties and burdens undertaken by management called “*The Principles of Scientific Management*.”

1. *The first principle is the deliberate gathering together of the great mass of traditional knowledge by means of time and motion study;*
2. *The second principle is the scientific selection of the workers and then their progressive development;*
3. *The third principle is the bringing together of this science and the trained worker, by offering some incentive to the worker; and*
4. *The fourth principle involves a complete redivision of the work of the establishment, to bring about democracy and cooperation between the management and the workers.*

For modern organizations to successfully transition the majority of employees back to in-person work, and to support the remaining remote workers, organizational leadership must address all levels of organizational culture. The benefits of the in-person cultural must outweigh the benefits of work-from-home. Taylorism continues to instruct managers that workers will soldier together to mitigate against modern labor demands (Wrege & Greenwood, 1991). Southwest Airlines learned the hard way that workers can destroy \$75 million in profits collectively over a weekend when mandatory vaccine shots violated their perceptions of a social contract (Bell & Kennebrew, 2023). Psychology has shown carrots work better than sticks: threatening remote workers’ jobs is an extremely bad idea!

The pandemic taught workers they could work from home and still contribute successfully to the bottom-line. Managers’ plea for the majority of workers to come back to a physical office building to work in-person seems to be falling on deaf ears for a large percent of remote workers. There is an apparent reluctance on the part of remote workers to un-learn the expectations and benefits they learned during the pandemic about remote work, and to now give-it-up to endure the office politics for in-person work seems unfeasible.

Purpose of Our Study

We aimed to investigate the interplay between leadership approaches, the essence of organizational culture, and employee preferences regarding remote work post-pandemic. Our study differentiates “*telecommuting*” historically, defining remote work as tasks performed outside a company’s physical space from “*hybrid work*” which is also introduced to denote remote and in-person work. We examined secondary sources published between 2019 and 2023 in academic journals, blogs, and websites.

Our research explored the evolution of remote work, emphasizing the need for companies to adapt organizational culture to align with employee preferences. Edgar Schein’s (2004) definition of culture was used to operationalize the study and place boundaries around the meaning of organizational culture. Edgar Schein’s theory on organizational culture provides a framework for understanding the deep-seated aspects of organizational culture: artifacts, espoused values, and underlying assumptions levels, and how political culture influences human behavior. Edgar Schein (2004) defines culture:

“as a pattern of shaped basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems” (Schein, 2004, p. 17).

Transforming an organizational culture often involves aligning visible artifacts and behaviors with the espoused values and challenging and reshaping the fundamental assumptions contributing to a dysfunctional or unethical culture (Schein, 2004). Our findings, therefore, contribute to the literature by elucidating how our findings help to inform leaders about organizational culture that leverages remote work to retain talent, increase productivity, decrease absenteeism and lower operational costs.

In the present business environment, the extensive acceptance of remote work has introduced novel challenges and opportunities for leadership. It is apparent that physically returning to an office space in-

person is daunting for too many remote workers. Relying on established leadership principles, we wanted to know if managerialism would require organizations to adjust to remote work reconsiderations, augmenting leadership strategies, with a new focus on adaptability, employee engagement, and collaboration. We, therefore, asked the following research question.

RQ1: *Why are so many remote workers, post-pandemic, reluctant to endure the politics of organizational culture in-person?*

FROM TELECOMMUTING TO A REMOTE WORK URGENCY

Remote work gained mass popularity due to the COVID-19 pandemic urgency; however, it is not a new concept. It was previously referred to as “telecommuting,” a term coined by Jack Nilles, a NASA Rocket Scientist, during the early 1970s while working on a project to address fuel consumption issues amid an oil crisis (Ortiz-Farmer, 2005). Scholars from the University of Southern California were researching this radical way of doing business. The research explored the potential impact of using telecommunications and computer technology to replace certain forms of urban transportation. The focus was on alleviating peak commuting loads in major U.S. cities, emphasizing enabling the information technology industry to work remotely to achieve this goal (Nilles et al., 1976). The style of work continued to grow gradually. Twenty-first-century technological advances, such as the Internet and cloud-based computing programs, allowed work to be carried out virtually. By 2019, about seven percent of the U.S. labor force worked remotely (Barrero et al., 2023). Organizational leadership is vital for designing, implementing, and sustaining effective remote work policies.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of remote work. The global crisis taught organizations two things. First, they must take proactive approaches to be prepared to overcome unforeseen situations. Second, remote work is here to stay (Barrero et al., 2021). A 2020 study by McKinsey & Company emphasizes the importance of adjusting employees’ skills and roles to enhance the resilience of operating models in the aftermath of the pandemic-induced changes in working methods (Sapana Agrawal et al., 2020). Adam Ozimek and Upwork Chief Economist argue that the profound and swift transformation due to COVID-19 is the most significant shift in the global workforce since World War II (Ozimek, 2020). According to National Council on Compensation Insurance (NCCI) information, remote workers in the U.S. accounted for 6% of the labor force before the pandemic. That number increased to 35% by May 2020 (Coate, 2021). However, it is worth noting that remote work adoption was feasible due to having the technological platforms to support such a workstyle (Barrero et al., 2023).

The pandemic meant that organizations needed to transform their organizational culture and view remote work as a benefit to meet the needs of professionals in the workforce (Lusoli, 2022). Working from home has gained popularity among industry professionals, challenging employers to create new opportunities (Barrero et al., 2023). Barrero, Bloom, and Davis’s (2021) study found that 40% of Americans working remotely at least once a week would seek new employment if their employers required a total return to the workplace (Barrero et al., 2021). Nearly every university went online completely or had a major portion of their curricula redesigned to meet the needs of students forced into quarantine. It is very likely the willingness of students to accept remote work and the eagerness of university faculty learning how to deliver course content online is what saved most universities from ruin (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2023; Bahasoan, et al, 2020; Camargo, et al 2020). Software application like Zoom and DocuSign played a huge role in helping universities and healthcare professional to stave the COVID-19 hurricane (Maor, et al 2023; Phillips, et al 2023; Volmar, et al 2023). Form documents used to by nearly every large organization, i.e., add/drop forms, registration forms, and grade appeals, were especially amenable to DocuSign’s utility.

Remote Work and Office Culture Politics

Leaders set the tone, establish expectations, and provide the direction needed to ensure that remote work aligns with organizational objectives and promotes a positive and productive work environment. Schein’s model suggests that to understand and change an organization’s culture, leaders must go beyond

the surface-level artifacts and behaviors and delve into the underlying values and, even more challenging, the unconscious assumptions. Remote work culture involves examining visible artifacts and behaviors to assess the tangible aspects of the organization's culture, especially in a remote/hybrid work setting. The alignment of espoused values with the updated organizational culture is crucial, requiring revisions to mission/vision statements, codes of conduct, and official documents. The most challenging task involves addressing basic assumptions and unconscious beliefs deeply ingrained in the organization's DNA, influencing how employees perceive the world and make decisions.

Recognizing that each layer is equally important, organizations must take a holistic approach, giving equal consideration to all levels and implementing a strategic plan tailored to the organization's needs to achieve a successful cultural shift and gain employee buy-in. In a recent study conducted by Savino and Foster the researchers refer to organizational culture as a "sacred element". They explain that the organizational culture is the lifeblood that guides organizations, enabling effective daily and long-term operations. Since 2020, the shift to remote and hybrid work has tested many cultures. Organizations now face the crucial question of how to move forward post-pandemic, significantly impacting their culture (Savino & Foster, 2024).

Remote workers encounter various challenges in navigating office politics remotely, including issues related to inclusion, visibility, bias, relationship building, and advocating for their needs. Effective communication, proactive engagement, and a strong work ethic are crucial for remote workers to successfully manage office politics from a distance. Despite the bustling nature of public spaces like restaurants post-pandemic, office buildings remain largely vacant, posing challenges for downtown economies and corporate culture. Employees cite reasons such as high expenses, caregiving responsibilities, and the continued prevalence of virtual meetings for their reluctance to return to the office. While many prefer the flexibility of remote work, employers increasingly push for a return to in-person work, creating a disconnect between employer desires and employee preferences. Financial and lifestyle benefits drive some employees to request full-time remote work (Smith & Carpenter, 2023).

Despite its allure, recent data suggests that fully remote workers experience fewer promotions compared to their office-based counterparts, particularly women who receive less mentorship. This disparity, attributed to "proximity bias," poses challenges for remote workers seeking career advancement. While some prioritize commuting to the office to mitigate career setbacks, companies like Egnyte strive to provide equal opportunities for remote and in-office employees. Additionally, hybrid workers face similar promotion prospects to fully on-site employees, while remote workers experience reduced promotion opportunities despite their higher productivity levels. However, some prioritize personal well-being and work-life balance over career advancement, indicating differing values within the workforce (Chen, 2024).

Remote work also poses challenges for building professional networks and receiving feedback, leading to concerns about career trajectory and impostor syndrome among younger workers. They may feel forgotten or excluded from opportunities, as supervisors often prioritize those they interact with in person. Additionally, remote communication can lead to misunderstandings and strained relationships (Janin, 2022). A major challenge is performance visibility (Bailey and Kurland, 2002). In their research, (Kłopotek, 2017) explains that employees find it more difficult for co-workers to recognize the effort and time invested in tasks. Despite working long hours on a particular issue, employees might not receive the same recognition they would from a supervisor in a traditional work setting where their efforts would be more visible and appreciated.

Despite the potential downsides, some young workers appreciate remote work's flexibility and work-life balance. A study conducted by Forbes indicates that Millennials, in particular, increasingly prefer the flexibility offered by remote work (Haan, 2023). However, they still value occasional in-person interactions for collaboration and relationship-building. Employers must actively engage younger remote workers to foster connections and prevent turnover, potentially through structured onboarding programs and periodic in-person meetings. Ultimately, offering flexibility in where and how work is done can benefit both employees and employers (Janin, 2022).

Qi, Xu, and Liu's research findings indicate that employees' self-control positively impacts their self-efficacy in remote work, leading to increased work effectiveness. Furthermore, perceived organizational

support, interaction with supervisors, and family support amplify the effect of self-control on remote work self-efficacy (Qi et al., 2023). According to Mäkikangas et al. (2022), organizational support is a key factor in enhancing employees' affective commitment and job involvement.

Sánchez-Vergara et al. explore the growing prominence of remote work, emphasizing its importance and the need for policies and infrastructure to support this trend. They highlight global shifts towards accommodating remote work arrangements, reflecting broader societal acceptance and integration of remote work practices (Sánchez-Vergara et al., 2023). Similarly, Peter Cappelli's book, "The Future of the Office," delves into the challenges and opportunities presented by remote work, offering insights into navigating its complexities and broader societal implications. Cappelli states, "This could be the moment to redefine what work means for employees and it fits into society." (Cappelli, 2021). Despite resistance from employers like Elon Musk, the pandemic has underscored the need to redefine work arrangements and retain talent through remote options. Zoom, once synonymous with remote work during the pandemic, has surprised many by mandating its own employees to return to the office, aligning with a trend among businesses to enforce return mandates. The company requires employees living within 50 miles of an office to work in person at least twice a week, citing the effectiveness of a structured hybrid approach. While this decision sparked strong reactions and wry headlines, some experts like Nicholas Bloom find it sensible, considering Zoom's investment in office space and the existing hybrid work model for most employees. Despite the push for in-office collaboration, office occupancy remains below pre-pandemic levels, reflecting a broader shift in work dynamics and the ongoing debate over remote versus in-person work (Masih, 2023).

Meanwhile, Howe and Menges conducted a study on individuals' beliefs about the learnability of remote work and their association with emotions and productivity during remote work. The widespread transition to remote work prompted this study, revealing hypotheses regarding attitudes toward remote work and its impact on emotions and productivity (Howe & Menges, 2022). A significant belief related to emotions and productivity while working remotely is the concept of autonomy. Hackman and Oldham (1975) define autonomy as the degree to which employees possess the freedom, authority, independence, and discretion to make job-related decisions. Essentially, autonomy enables employees to determine "what tasks to do and how to do them." This organizational resource empowers employees by granting them decision-making authority, fostering a sense of self-control, and enhancing their productivity and emotional well-being (Edmondson & Matthews, 2024).

The future of remote work appears promising, given the growing evidence suggesting its positive impact on productivity. However, research uncovers crucial factors: employees' beliefs about remote work significantly influence their ability to transition successfully to remote work. Specifically, employees who view remote work as a skill anyone can develop are more likely to embrace it, while those who perceive it as an inherent trait may struggle. Organizations should consider how employee mindsets impact their adjustment to remote work to foster a brighter future for remote work. Cultivating adaptive mindsets, particularly growth mindsets regarding remote work, can empower employees to thrive in both crises and stable times. Additionally, as remote work technologies become increasingly integral and sophisticated, they play a vital role in supporting the mindset necessary for remote work success. Therefore, organizations that adopt (Suarez, 2022).

SUMMARY OF OUR FINDINGS

After experiencing the benefits of remote work, some professionals prefer this working style or a hybrid option. Barrero, Bloom, and Davis's 2021 study revealed that 56% of employees are more likely to consider a new job with remote/hybrid flexibility, with a more significant portion of respondents identifying as women (Barrero et al., 2021). Due to the increased desire of professionals for flexibility in working arrangements, organizations must assess their landscape to determine where it makes sense to create flexibility. Organizations must take a holistic, two-sided approach to implement these strategies successfully. One side focuses on the organization's benefits from the remote/hybrid working policies. A Boston Consulting Group (BCG) study revealed that remote working models could increase employee

productivity by 15 to 40 percent, reduce turnover by 10 to 15 percent, decrease absenteeism by 40 percent, and lead to a potential reduction in real estate expenses of 20 percent (Elizabeth Kaufman et al., 2020). Airbnb, Allstate Insurance, Verizon, and Pinterest are among the organizations that have permanently shifted their organizational culture to work remotely/hybrid (Smith, 2023). By prioritizing flexibility, these companies let their constituents know they value their feedback and are willing to make changes that appeal to the masses.

Making these working adjustments requires leaders to use The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership®. Leadership must model the way. They cannot say something and do something different. Kouzes and Posner explain that leadership behavior earns their constituents' trust and buy-in. After the leadership updated policies, they inspired and shared the vision by sharing them with staff and having a flexible policy where employees can select the option that best works for them. These companies are challenging the process by not returning to pre-pandemic status and being forward-thinking. Kouzes and Posner (2017) emphasize that leaders "need to search for opportunities by seizing the initiative and looking outward for innovative ways to improve" (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Organizations making permanent shifts are enabling others to act. Not only are they enabling their constituents to embrace the changes, but they are also change agents that enable other companies to follow their steps. A significant contributor to this practice is "fostering collaboration and building trust" (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). The McKinsey and Company and BCG studies show that collaboration and trust are necessary for successful remote/hybrid work implementations (Sapana Agrawal et al., 2020; Elizabeth Kaufman et al., 2020).

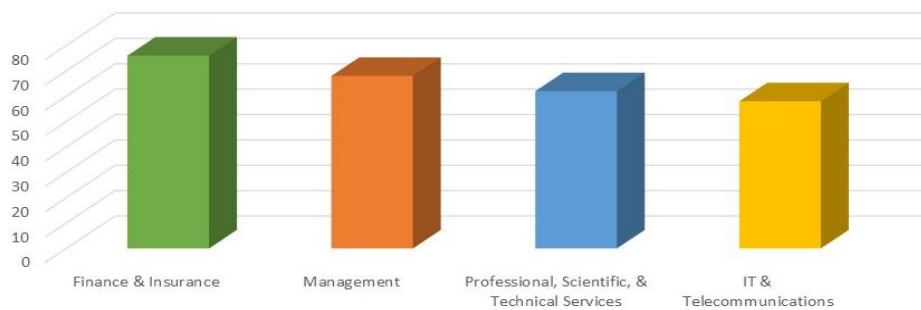
Companies that take an employee-centric approach encourage the heart of their constituents. Employees feel valued, and this practice leads to the second prong. In the book "People-Centric Organizational Change" Hodges (2024) asserts that the key to achieving successful business change is through engaging employees and making the transformation people-centric. The second prong focuses on employee benefits from a remote/hybrid work approach. An Indeed article shows that remote/hybrid work has 17 significant benefits, including less time spent commuting, increased productivity and performance, improved work-life balance, the ability to stay connected, a custom work environment, healthier choices and lifestyle, less time spent in meetings, a remote approach is more environmentally friendly, it provides a change of scenery, decreases the need for employees to take sick days, saves employees money, provides schedule flexibility, improves focus, increases mobility, provides the flexibility of wearing comfortable clothes and shoes, and increases job opportunities and job satisfaction (Indeed Editorial Team, 2023). In 2020, the McKinsey Global Institute's analysis of 2,000 tasks and 800 jobs across nine countries indicated a likely persistence of hybrid work model's post-pandemic, particularly for the highly educated and well-paid minority of the workforce. The study emphasized removing cultural and technological barriers to remote work during the pandemic, leading to a structural and cultural shift in how some people work. However, it emphasized that the potential for remote work is determined by tasks and activities, not occupations (Lund et al., 2020).

The Remote Work Era Is Here to Stay

As the demand for post-pandemic remote/hybrid work increases, organizations must adapt their culture quickly. Especially with research showing that the quality of work produced by a group of individuals working remotely through video communication is comparable to that of a face-to-face team (Mäkikangas et al., 2022). Ozimek's findings indicate that the anticipated growth rate of remote/hybrid work between 2020 and 2025 is projected to double, increasing from 30% to 65% (Ozimek, 2020). Figure 2 outlines the industries with the most significant remote/hybrid work potential. The finance and insurance industries have a 76% potential. Management has 68%. Professional, scientific, and technical services have 62%, and IT and telecommunications have 58% (Lund et al., 2020). Figure 2 shows findings that indicate remote/hybrid work is here to stay. Remote/hybrid work has the potential to serve as a blueprint with long-term benefits for organizations by addressing changing workforce dynamics, enhancing flexibility, improving talent strategies, and fostering a more sustainable and adaptable work culture (Sapana Agrawal et al., 2020).

The transition will bring new skills as companies shift to a remote/hybrid work era. McKinsey & Company’s study notes that while many employees acquired skills through hands-on experience during the initial phase of the crisis or received rapid training, the ongoing trend of remote/hybrid work is likely to present a persistent challenge for upskilling (Agrawal et al., 2020). In 2023, full-time working arrangements in the U.S. comprised 29% hybrid and 16% fully remote setups (Barrero, Bloom, & Davis, 2023). Additionally, data from 2021 indicated that 40% of Americans working remotely at least once a week would consider changing jobs if their employers mandated a complete return to the workplace (Barrero, Bloom, & Davis, 2021). Implementing remote/hybrid work models can boost productivity by up to 40%, decrease turnover by up to 15%, reduce absenteeism by 40%, and potentially cut real estate costs by more than 20% (Kaufman, et al., 2020).

FIGURE 2
INDUSTRIES WITH MOST SIGNIFICANT POTENTIAL FOR REMOTE/HYBRID WORK A
BLUEPRINT WITH LONG-TERM POTENTIAL



To successfully implement remote/hybrid work models, organizational leadership should leverage *The Five Practices of Leadership® Framework*. This involves setting a long-term goal and commitment by exploring various remote/hybrid work versions (model the way). By adopting a job-by-job or function-by-function approach, organizations inspire a shared vision with their constituents. Leaders should challenge the process and consider onsite client interaction, specialized equipment needs, supervision, and regulatory oversight. Enable others to act by fostering collaboration and interaction among constituents. Moreover, leaders can enable others to act by creating an environment that encourages the heart by welcoming innovation. This comprehensive leadership approach is vital for successfully adopting remote/hybrid work models (Kaufman et al., 2020).

The evolution of remote work from the early concept of “telecommuting” to the widespread adoption of remote and hybrid work models has been significantly influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic acted as a catalyst, accelerating the acceptance and normalization of remote work across various industries. The shift from traditional office setups to flexible remote and hybrid arrangements reflects a profound transformation in the global workforce. This research explored the emergent and unanticipated benefits of remote work, the evolution of remote work, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the necessity for organizations to adapt their culture to align with the preferences and needs of professionals in the workforce. This study viewed remote work from the lens of Edgar Schein’s Organizational Culture Theory. The literature review established that remote/hybrid work has long-term potential, serving as a blueprint for organizations navigating changing workforce dynamics. Many more employees than anticipated found a strong desire to remain remote and are reluctant to return to the office culture. The research findings underscore the importance of organizational leadership, cultural adaptation, and skills enhancement in successfully implementing remote/hybrid work models. Our five recommendations for organizations struggling to call employees back to the office post-pandemic spawn from Kouzes and Posner’s “Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership.”

In his “Leading Change” work, John Kotter emphasizes that to initiate organizational change successfully, leaders need to build a persuasive case that outlines the organization’s risks and opportunities.






Furthermore, effective communication involves conveying the situation’s urgency, motivating individuals to act, and emphasizing the benefits of the proposed change. We recommend that organizations leading change and adopting remote/hybrid work post-pandemic utilize the Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership® framework.

In envisioning the future of remote work, we suggest that leaders draw upon the anecdotal claims presented by Kouzes and Posner (2017) to inspire a shared vision among employees. Kouzes and Posner argue that influential leaders articulate a compelling vision that appeals to the values and aspirations of their team (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Kotter recommended that leaders communicate a vision emphasizing the benefits of remote work. Organizations should include corporate anecdotes that highlight the positive impact of this work style and aim to inspire a collective sense of purpose and commitment from employees. This approach would allow leadership to prospect the future, express their passion, and make a case for commitment—all factors discussed in Chapter 5 of Kouzes and Posner’s book.

The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership

The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership® framework comprises ten commitments that center on modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart. Table 2 illustrates the model and provides explanations for each commitment. In the first practice, leaders model the way.

TABLE 2
THE FIVE PRACTICES AND TEN COMMITMENTS OF EXEMPLARY LEADERSHIP

Model the Way		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Leaders clarify the values by finding their voice and affirming their shared values. 2. Leaders set the example by aligning actions with shared values.
Inspire a Shared Vision		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Leaders envision the future by imagining exciting and enabling opportunities. 4. Leaders enlist others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations.
Challenge the Process		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Leaders search for opportunities by seizing the initiative and looking outward for innovative ways to improve. 6. Leaders experiment and take risks by consistently generating small wins and learning from experience.
Enable Others to Act		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Leaders foster collaboration by building trust and facilitating relationships. 8. Leaders strengthen others by increasing self-determination and developing competence.
Encourage the Heart		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Leaders recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence. 10. Leaders celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit of community.

Kouzes & Posner, 2017, P. 24

The first practice is to model how leaders must clarify and affirm shared values by finding their voice and setting an example by aligning their actions with them.

The second practice is to inspire a shared vision. Leaders accomplish this by envisioning the future, imagining and enabling exciting opportunities, and enlisting others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations.

The third practice is to challenge the process. In this practice, leaders seek opportunities by seizing the initiative and looking outward for innovative ways to improve. They experiment and take risks by consistently generating small wins and learning from experience.

The fourth practice involves enabling others to act. Leaders foster collaboration, build trust, and facilitate relationships by enabling others to act. They strengthen others by increasing self-determination and developing competence.

The fifth and final practice is encouraging the heart. Through this practice, leaders recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence. They celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit of community. The remainder of the literature review will highlight recent studies that delve into the growing demand for remote/hybrid work models.

Our Recommendations

Edgar Schein's Organizational Culture Theory provides a valuable framework for understanding the deep-seated aspects of organizational culture. It emphasizes the significance of addressing visible artifacts, espoused values, and unconscious assumptions to create a meaningful cultural shift. Organizational leadership plays a crucial role in setting the tone, establishing expectations, and providing direction to ensure remote work aligns with organizational objectives.

The impact of the pandemic highlighted the need for organizations to be proactive and adaptable in the face of unforeseen challenges. Once considered a temporary solution, remote work has become a permanent fixture in the modern work landscape. Organizations must recognize the importance of aligning their organizational culture with the preferences and needs of professionals in the workforce.

Our recommendations section proposes the adoption of The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership® framework by Kouzes and Posner for organizations embracing remote and hybrid work post-pandemic. This framework encourages leaders to model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart. These practices are essential for building trust, fostering collaboration, and creating a positive work environment in remote settings.

We advocate for a substantial shift in organizational culture and present five key strategies to effectively bridge the gap in leadership approaches and organizational cultures. Remote and hybrid work options have long-term potential and can serve as a blueprint for organizations seeking to navigate changing workforce dynamics. As the demand for such work arrangements increases, organizations must adapt rapidly, leveraging the skills acquired during the pandemic and upskilling employees for continued success. The following *five recommendations* have been outlined to effectively bridge the gap in leadership approaches and organizational cultures.

Recommendation 1

Use "The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership" framework to lead organizational culture. The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership® framework provides a proven and comprehensive approach to leadership, ensuring that leaders effectively model behaviors, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart. This is crucial for successfully implementing and sustaining organizational change, especially in remote/hybrid work.

Recommendation 2

Leverage learnings from pandemic practices and technological advances to develop remote/hybrid work models. Leveraging pandemic practices and technological advances enables organizations to adapt to evolving work dynamics. It involves incorporating lessons from the swift transition to remote work during the pandemic, ensuring resilience and preparedness for future disruptions. Utilizing technical platforms, such as virtual meetings, cloud-based sharing capabilities, and project management tools, is crucial to equipping the virtual workforce to perform efficiently and effectively.

Recommendation 3

Listen to constituents when enforcing remote/hybrid work policies. Listening to constituents when enforcing remote/hybrid work policies is essential for considering the preferences and concerns of employees. This approach fosters better communication, engagement, and satisfaction among the workforce, contributing to a positive organizational culture.

Recommendation 4

Designate a professional development budget to keep up with the evolving digital landscape. Designating a professional development budget to keep up with the evolving digital landscape is crucial for ensuring that employees and leaders acquire the necessary skills for remote/hybrid work. Staying current with digital advancements is vital for organizational success and competitiveness.

Recommendation 5

Leverage remote work models to foster an employee benefit. Offering remote/hybrid models as an employee benefit contributes to talent attraction and retention, enhances employee satisfaction and work-life balance, increases productivity, adapts to employee preferences, and provides a competitive edge in the contemporary job market.

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